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COMICS FEATURE

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February No. 16

An interview with
MARY JO DUFFY

JEAN GREY in the **Storeroom of Sad Thought Balloons**

Rip-Off Comics

Milton Caniff's **MALE CALL**

The Original **X-MEN**

Wolfman and **Colan** on **DARK FORCE**

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Update...

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The Marvel Comics Group regrets to announce, yet again, "The Death of Captain Marvel." Yes, Captain Marvel is **still** dead. Full details will be released in Marvel's first graphic novel, a 64-page, full-color masterwork, on sale January 10, 1982; $5.95 only at specially selected outlets. Written and illustrated by **Jim Starlin**, it is not to be missed.

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COMICS FEATURE

FEBRUARY NUMBER 16

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SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT: THE X-MEN

Marvel's founding mutants analyzed *by Murray R. Ward.*

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MALE CALL
DOG TAGS AND LACE

Milton Caniff's wartime commentary-and-cheesecake strip re-evaluated *by Robert Rhodes.*

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©1981 Milton Caniff

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY JO DUFFY

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STAFF

HAL SCHUSTER
publisher

RICHARD HOWELL
CAROL KALISH
editors

BOB SORON
BRIAN MEYER
assistant editors

PETER SANDERSON
New York Correspondent

JACK SCHUSTER
president

RICHARD HOWELL
production manager

BILL KRUTCHICK
financial officer

KATHIE MARET
GARY JAEGER
traffic department

BIZARRO TYPESETTER #1
mascot

CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Balze
Claude Banff
Bill Black
Paul Dini
Carl Docks
Richard Howell
Carol Kalish
Tom Linehan
M. Madrid
Margaret O'Connell
Robert Rhodes
Peter Sanderson
Bob Soron
Don Thompson
Maggie Thompson
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- Our interviews consistently feature profiles of the most important and interesting comics professionals—past and present. Last year we interviewed Roy Thomas, Steve Englehart, Marv Wolfman, Steve Gerber, Frank Miller, and Leonard Starr. Upcoming in the next year are Mary Jo Duffy, John Byrne, Bill Mantlo, Max Allan Collins, and Stan Drake.
- Our articles spotlight both capable analysis and reviews of comics trends, as well as valuable historical research. **FEATURE** has lately presented Margaret O'Connell's **"Women and Power in Comics"** series, Murray R. Ward's **"Super-Team Spirit"** overview of every comics super-team, and Chuck Wooley's **"Lost Comics Companies."**
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OPENING NOTES

by Richard Howell

WITH FEATURE'S FACE VALUE THE THREE "I's" HAVE IT

Occasionally, we at *COMICS FEATURE* are asked what we think of our competition. Our answer is usually "We're not competing with anyone." Sometimes it gets believed at face value, although some cynical souls look on that answer as being rather smug—not to say snide.

Well, that answer is exactly what we mean. Despite the many superficial similarities between the other comics commentary magazines and ourselves, we think that we occupy a unique position on the specialty store shelves. *COMICS FEATURE*, since its initial issues under founding editor Dean Mullaney (under the watchful eye of then-and-now publisher Hal Schuster, as usual), has endeavored to present: interviews with past and present comics creators (with little more than a nodding acknowledgement of their fan-favorite marketability, thus ensuring a better-mixed bag than is generally seen); the latest news (garnered in a polite and professional manner, and—as far as we can tell—without stirring up any unnecessary ill will and indiscreet personality debates); interesting and involving articles (with their emphasis on constructive illumination, such as Margaret O'Connell's *"Women and Power"* series, or any example of Peter Sanderson's *"End Notes"*); and a hefty and healthy emphasis on educational historical pieces (such as Murray R. Ward's *"Super-Team Spirit"* series and Chuck Wooley's *"Lost Comics Companies"*).

Despite our necessary news/interviews/articles structure, we feel that *FEATURE* distinguishes itself through its aggregate attitude—toward interviews on the basis of interest (not marketability), *constructive* criticism, historical focus, and however much strictly-defined professionalism as we can muster (and hey, some days, we admit, are better than others).

Not that we haven't come under fire for this outlook. To some, enjoyment of comics which have no pretensions above *being enjoyed* is a rejection of the potential of the comics art form, an embrace of mediocrity, and a general betrayal of artistic standards. Well, there's probably a good deal to be said on either side of that argument before the object of the debate becomes sufficiently less abstract to be comprehensible, but I personally have never found "If you like the work of [fill-in-the-blank], then you're a tasteless boor" to be a particularly convincing line of reasoning.

As we continue to state: *FEATURE*'s role in the comics commentary marketplace is the three "I's": illumination, ideas, and interchange. These goals are interdependent to a certain extent, and can always be inhibited by smugness, aimless and indiscreet controversy, and general impertinence and unprofessionalism. When we say that, you can take it at face value.●

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MEA CULPA

Way back in *COMICS FEATURE #6*, we used two photos, one of Roger Stern and one of Paul Levitz, in our news section without first ascertaining and then securing the permission of the appropriate copyright owners. Both of these photos are *©1980* Fantagraphics, Inc. Our apologies for this error of omission and commission go first to all the folks at Fantagraphics and secondly to the original photographer, Michael Catron.●

MORNING NOTICES

SEND YOUR **FEATURE** COMMENTS TO:
COMICS FEATURE 31½ ROBERTS RD. #2
CAMBRIDGE MASS. 02138

Darren Madigan
Stately Wayne Manor, Syracuse NY

Dear Rich and Carol,

Just some random thoughts on CF #12/13:

I liked *"Opening Notes"*—but then, I like Rich's writing style. (I prefer his art—then he isn't competing with me—but...) Obviously, then, I also liked *"Evil Doer's Profiles,"* even though it didn't tell me anything I didn't already know (who yelled "Marvel zombie"? I'll hit him with my repulsor rays...).

On the subject of things I didn't know... Murray Ward's overview of the JLA was really nifty. It told me lots of stuff I hadn't known and all of it was presented in a skillful and interesting fashion. On the other hand, the FF overview told me nothing new (I've still got some charge left on those repulsor rays; don't say it...) though it was also well-written. Also discussing things I didn't know, Rich Morrissey's *"Shazam in the 1970s"* was a really good article. Though I personally think that the original Captain Marvel is so corny as to be actively painful (earth-conquering worms? Talking tigers? UNCLE MARVEL? Give me a break...) I found the article fascinating. The concept may reek of stupidity, but it sure was interesting. Pity Julie Schwartz had to treat poor old C.C. Beck so shabbily. Oh, well... And, after hearing about the damn thing for a month, I finally got to read Kurt Busiek's *"Dracula"* article. Strangely enough, I seem to like it more than he does... I found it to be a very well-written and informative overview (though I have to disagree with him on one point; I think that the last forty issues of *TOD* were junk that never should have been published).

More Howell illustrations!

Also, more Kalish articles...after all, if I don't see 'em, I can't take violent offense with them, can I? (Just kidding...actually, I can take violent offense with anything, sight unseen...but doing it with Carol's articles is so much more fun...)

What a strange idea—doing a review of a movie that the reviewer couldn't understand a word of... (I know, there were extenuating circumstances with Sanderson's review of the Dracula animated movie. It still strikes me as a little odd...)

The reviews were interesting. Steve Gerber's comments on Superman leave me with the fervent hope that he never gets to write the book, as I simply can't see Superman as the sort of person who would ever even think of the concept of crushing the person next to him on the subway like an eggshell, much less ponder the ramifications of it. DC characters are unreal, and they should damn well stay that way! Marv Wolfman sounds like a really nice guy. Beyond that, I will shut up my mouf...

Just in time, too, eh, Darren? Well, as usual, your letter was full of scattershot comments—and as usual some of it could use some explanation. Although we might agree that the later issues of TOMB OF DRACULA lacked a certain issue-to-issue experimentation that the earlier numbers in the series had, more explanation of why you considered the later ones to be "junk" is in order before that particular opinion becomes anything more than mud-slinging. What are your reasons for that statement? You know we're not going to edit out a reader's definition of standards by which he judged anything—be it FEATURE or whatever—so don't be so quick to assume that you needn't include it. It's possible that by your definition of junk comics, the last forty issues of TOD were junk, but unless you tell us why, we'll never be able to do more than criticize your presentation (and you won't be helping Marv Wolfman or any other writer figure out what that segment of his audience you know best wants to see).

Captain Marvel—reek of stupidity? Try reading some more of them, Darren, and assume this time that they know how ridiculous the story premeses are, how silly the characters act sometimes, etc., but the creators find them enjoyable anyway. The new "Shazam!" series seems to appeal the most to adults and to very young children, with teenagers (in general) assuming that it's "talking down" to them and disliking it for that. Try assuming that Captain Marvel and crew aren't declaring (through example) that comics heroes and comics adventures are stupid-and-so-are-you-for-reading-them, but rather that comics are fantastic and enjoyable —and the more fantastic they are, the more enjoyable they are. Captain Marvel may never be quite your cup of tea, but the series has an indisputable charm, and, with a little coaching, it might show itself to you, too.●

FIRST ISSUE!!!

COVER BY PAUL GULACY!

AD: R. BRUNING-ARKANSAS STUDIO

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HEADLINES

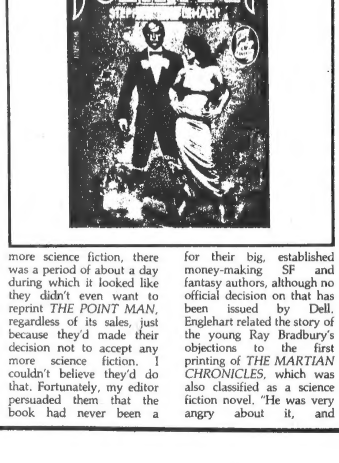
POINT MAN SCORES

STEVE ENGLEHART'S FIRST NOVEL SELLS OUT

Former Marvel and DC comics writer Steve Englehart's first published novel, *THE POINT MAN*, has sold out of its first printing. The novel, which deals with a Vietnam veteran's private war against a KGB-trained psychic attack force, sold its 75,000 first edition print run within three weeks of on sale time. According to sources at Dell, sales of that magnitude and speed for a first novel by a new writer for their science fiction/fantasy line is "unique in Dell's history."

The second edition of *THE POINT MAN*, which will be printed and on sale by mid-November, will be distinguished by several alterations in the cover, including the correction of Robert Anton Wilson's status to co-author of the *ILLUMINATI*, and the removal of the *"Dell Fantasy"* series imprint on the front cover.

According to Englehart, his editor at Dell had initially agreed to print *THE POINT MAN* without the *"Dell Fantasy"* imprint, but staff changeovers close to the book's original press date resulted in a series of mix-ups which resulted in the book being re-classified into genre fiction. The correction of this mistake is fortunate in several ways. Englehart explains, "Dell is moving out of publishing science fiction and fantasy novels, so *THE POINT MAN* was published just in time to get in under the wire. The really strange part is that because Dell didn't want to print any more science fiction, there was a period of about a day during which it looked like they didn't even want to reprint *THE POINT MAN*, regardless of its sales, just because they'd made their decision not to accept any more science fiction. I couldn't believe they'd do that. Fortunately, my editor persuaded them that the book had never been a science fiction novel, so it was okay to reprint it." Englehart notes that in all probability, Dell will relax their "no science fiction" rule for their big, established money-making SF and fantasy authors, although no official decision on that has been issued by Dell. Englehart related the story of the young Ray Bradbury's objections to the first printing of *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES*, which was also classified as a science fiction novel. "He was very angry about it, and demanded that the next edition of that book and every printing of every subsequent book of his be classified as 'general fiction.' Bradbury later told Dick Lupoff that he was convinced that, if he hadn't made the break away from being a science fiction writer early on in his career, he would never have gained the widespread acceptance he did, and his career would never have been as successful as it became." Englehart adds, "Of course, that example is only part of why I objected to the classification of *THE POINT MAN* as fantasy." The author maintains that his novel's paranormal phenomena are all fully justifiable through documentation, and that the assumption that it was too fantastic to be true is incorrect.



Englehart's strong sales on his first novel will, according to the author, doubtless help him in his presentation for his second novel, which Dell has been reviewing since late Summer 1981. "They told me that there were still the same problems of evaluating my second novel's presentation as there were with my first one, because, since they still had no sales figures for me, I was in effect still a new author. *THE POINT MAN*'s sales reports will give them something to go on, at least." Englehart's second novel has, in its present form, nothing

Wallace Wood
1927-1981

Wallace Wood, one of the comics industry's most influential and respected artists, died sometime between October 31 and November 3, 1981, apparently from self-inflicted gunshot wounds. He was 54. Wood's body was found by his employer, Barbara Friedman of Nuance Publications. Although no suicide note was discovered among Wood's effects, many friends believed that Wood's declining health and his reluctance to undergo mandatory dialysis were the main reasons leading to the tragedy.

Wood's comics career was a long, diverse, and valuable one. He began as an assistant for Will Eisner, drawing *"Spirit"* stories, in 1949; at roughly the same time, he began working in the comic book field, drawing crime and romance comics.

In 1951, Wood gravitated to EC Comics, where he quickly developed into comics' foremost science-fiction artist. Previously, science-fiction comics art had been very streamlined, with its major influence being Alex Raymond. Wood took sf art in the other direction, bringing a detailed, photographic yet highly idealized effect that had not been used in the genre before.

Wood's work was sensational and he quickly became the most in-demand artist for science-fiction comics. However, at EC he also illustrated many of their other genres, including the "suspenstory" brand of realistic crime.

When EC's comics line folded and *MAD* was transformed into a black-and-white magazine, Wood stayed with that, becoming one of the industry's foremost humor artists as well. The panels of his parodies were as crammed as those of his sf stories, but they were crammed with sight gags rather than machinery or detail-laden landscapes. In *MAD*, Wood expanded his range of techniques, expertly imitating nearly every known cartoonist and mimicking the art techniques used on movie posters, paperback covers, and actual photograpy.

"The Pipsqueak Papers," from Wood's own *WITZEND*.

In the late 1950s, Wood worked with comics great Jack Kirby in several collaborative projects, including the syndicated comic strip *SKY MASTERS* and the initial issues of DC's *CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN*.

The early 1960s found Wood at Marvel Comics, artistically overhauling the *DAREDEVIL* strip (of which he even wrote an issue), and inking some other strips (including Don Heck's *AVENGERS*). In 1965, Wood became the packager of a line of comics for Tower Publishing. Those creations, the *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS*, attracted many top professionals of that period, and featured work by the likes of Steve Ditko, Reed Crandall, Gil Kane, and Manny Stallman. This fondly-remembered series is due for revival in the near future.

When Tower folded, Wood returned to DC, where he worked on one of the first of DC's licensed-toy comics, *CAPTAIN ACTION*, and continued his consistently excellent inking on Frank Robbins' and Bob Brown's *SUPERBOY* issues.

An example of Wood's craftint work, from *BLAZING COMBAT*.

Another of Wood's accomplishments of this period was *WITZEND*, one of the first of what has become known as "alternative comics." With *WITZEND*, Wood allowed creators to retain copyright of their work, and allowed the creators the freedom to work with the themes and ideas which interested them. Contributors to *WITZEND* included Jeffrey Jones, Ralph Reese, Steve Ditko, Al Williamson, Vaughn Bode, and Frank Frazetta.

In the 1970s, Wood freelanced for virtually every comics company, including DC (including *HERCULES UNBOUND*, *SANDMAN*, *ISIS*, and *WONDER WOMAN*), Marvel, Atlas (at which the *Ditko/Wood* team was reunited on *THE DESTRUCTOR*), and Warren. He also worked more frequently for limited-press alternative markets (including his own syndicated comic strips *SALLY FORTH* and *CANNON*), and eventually published his own work of fantasy, *THE WIZARD KING*, in 1978.

Wood also ran a studio which apprenticed many important comics artists, including Marvel editor Larry Hama, DC inker Dan Adkins, former Charlton writer Nicola Cuti, *HEAVY METAL* artist Paul Kirchner, Ralph Reese, Wayne Howard, and numerous others.

Wood's work in comics leaves an impressive standard of achievement, and a record level of quality and quantity which will stand for many years to come. ●

Russ Manning
1929-1981

Russ Manning, famed artist of *MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER* and *TARZAN* (both comic books and comic strips), as well as the original writer/artist of the *STAR WARS* newspaper strip, died on December 1, 1981 from cancer of the colon. Manning suffered from cancer for two years prior to his death.

Manning's artistic contributions to the comics industry began in 1952 when he joined Western Publishing. For fifteen years, he drew various titles, including many of Western's movie adaptations and the *"Brothers of the Spear"* featurette. He first attracted widespread notice from comics fans with his masterful work of *MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER* (which began in 1962) and, later, the *TARZAN* title (1965-8). His work on the *TARZAN* comic attracted the attention of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc, resulting in them arranging for Manning to assume control of the syndicated *TARZAN* comic strip, which he wrote and drew until 1977. Manning's success with his syndicated strip made him the logical choice to begin Lucasfilm's *STAR WARS* comic strip. He continued with that strip until his illness forced him into semi-retirement.

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Manning was also one of the field's professionals who openly encouraged fandom from its outset, often to the extent of hosting local area conventions in his own home in the early and mid-1960s. He was unstinting of his time in helping aspiring young comics artists, and many professionals were aided by Manning at one time or another in the early days of their careers.

Manning's family has been left with massive medical bills incurred during his long illness. The Modjeska Firefighters Association has initiated the Russ Manning Fund as a way to aid the family. Friends and admirers are encouraged to donate what they can. All donations should be made out to:

the Russ Manning Fund
c/o Modjeska Firefighters Association
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Orange, CA 92667 ●

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Fredric Wertham
1895-1981

Dr. Fredric Wertham, renowned psychiatrist whose 1950s commentaries on comic books sparked controversies that continue today, died November 18 at his home in Pennsylvania. He was 86.

Dr. Wertham was born Fredric Wertheimer in 1895 in Bulgaria. In the early 1920s, he conducted a correspondence with Sigmund Freud that led to his decision to become a psychiatrist. In 1922, he came to the United States, becoming a citizen (and changing his surname to Wertham) in 1927. In 1932, he became senior psychiatrist with the New York City Department of Hospitals.

While working in the hospitals, Dr. Wertham began to notice that many of the juvenile delinquents he encountered read comics. Suspecting a cause-effect relationship, Dr. Wertham began studying comics. His conclusions led him to campaign against the violence in comics, writing magazine articles and lecturing. Eventually, he appeared at the Senate Kefauver hearings, testifying against comics, and wrote *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*, which explained—visually and verbally—what he felt was wrong with comics.

The effects of the hearings and of *SOTI* on the comics industry were devastating. Only a handful of the dozens of comics publishers survived, and those survivors created a self-censoring authority. Fans who saw a cause-effect relationship have vilified Wertham since.

Dr. Wertham was a favorite target in the fan press; out of an ethical consideration, many fan editors would send Dr. Wertham their publications which discussed Wertham's work in the 1960s and early 1960s. This led to the 1973 publication of the book *THE WORLD OF FANZINES*, discussing them as a unique form of communication. While the book was subject to overgeneralization, no other work of that scope has been written on the subject.

Dr. Wertham is survived by his wife of 53 years, Florence. ●

DC

SUPERMAN FAMILY has been cancelled; the last issue will be #222, out in June. According to Nelson Bridwell, its place on the schedule will be taken by a new *SUPERGIRL* book. Carmine Infantino will pencil the lead feature. The back-up will be *"Lois Lane,"* by the current creators.

Pending room in his schedule, Gil Kane will be doing some covers for DC. A Kane/Giordano cover is tentatively scheduled for *SUPERMAN #374*.

Kurt Schaffenberger will be inking more of his own work in the near future, including one *"Superman—The In-Between Years."*

The new creative team on *GREEN LANTERN* is Mike W. Barr (writer) and Keith Pollard (pencils).

An upcoming three-parter in *SUPERMAN* involves the marriage of Lana Lang to Vartox. Script by Cary Bates, pencils by Curt Swan.

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ACTION COMICS will be featuring an unusual story-line for *"Superman"* in the near future. According to writer Marv Wolfman, Superman will be brought back into the past by villains who need his powers for a quest. Using a magic runestone, they separate Superman into two beings, each with some of the powers of the original. The Superman with invulnerability is captured and kept in the past, while the other is returned to the present. At one point in the story, according to Wolfman, a gun is fired at Superman and, while the still-invulnerable costume prevents the bullet from penetrating, enough damage is done to his body that he is sent to a hospital in critical condition. The storyline will last seven or eight issues, according to Wolfman.

Also in that series, Superman will meet the Omega Men, from Wolfman's stint on *GREEN LANTERN*. The appearance will initiate a cross-over with Superman and the Teen Titans.

In the Teen Titans' own book, a new villain named Brother Blood will be introduced. Brother Blood comes from Zambia, the island featured in the recent *"Doom Patrol"* series. Wolfman said that the villain, who has a religious motif, would be "The Doctor Doom for the Titans." He will appear in issues #21-22 of *NEW TEEN TITANS*.

In issue #23, Starfire's sister (who is still unnamed) will be introduced, in a storyline that will continue through the next two issues and conclude in the *TEEN TITANS ANNUAL*.

Wolfman said that *TITANS* would be featuring more multi-part stories than has been seen recently.

An upcoming *DC SPECIAL DIGEST* will feature *"Superman vs. Luthor,"* with a number of stories by Edmond Hamilton from the 1960s. More recent stories included will feature Curt Swan's pencils, with inking by Murphy Anderson, Jack Abel, and Kurt Schaffenberger.

Also forthcoming is a *HOUSE OF MYSTERY* digest. Stories to be included had not been finalized at press time.

The Bizarro mini-series has not yet been scheduled, nor has an artist been chosen. The plot involves Bizarro #1's decision to write the history of the Bizarro World, Htrae. Writer Nelson Bridwell explains that Bizarro #1 writes a true history of the planet; when he realizes that this, according to Bizarro logic, makes the history *incorrect*, he goes back in time to change the past so that the history will be "correct."

DC will be moving to new offices at 666 5th Avenue, across the street from their current location, soon.

Upcoming cross-overs at DC: The Teen Titans will be in *ACTION #532*; the Human Target in *DETECTIVE #515*; and Man-Bat in *BATMAN #348*.

DC is currently working to complete the return of original art to the many artists who have worked for the company over the decades.

While DC is having some success, they have been unable to locate many artists, and are enlisting fandom's aid in finding them. The artists are:

Tony Abruzzo, J. Albistur, Douglas Aleksey, Stookie Allen, O. Aremcunan, Elizabeth Berube, T. Bird, Mrs. Bob Brown, Derek Carter, Sid Check, Crane, Gerald Forton, Anita Greene, Harper, Tom Hickey, Wayne Howard, Dennis Janke, Lore, L. S. Martinez, Neal McDonald, Tanchi Mendoza, Mills, Bill Montes, Sparky Moore, Maro Nana, James Pak, Ray Perry, Piscopo, Stanley Pitt, Reilly, Ripee, Frank Robbins, Schenkman, Dave Simons, Leo Summers, Ed Waldman, Ed Whelan, Alfred Williams, and Kevin Woodcock.

While many of these are Golden Age artists, some are from the 1970s (Frank Robbins), and at least one (Gerald Forton) is from the last year.

Until late 1974, DC's position was that the company owned the original artwork. While this system had its adversaries, most of them continued to work under that policy, albeit under protest.

The situation became much more tense when DC moved to new offices in 1973. Some people noticed the lack of organization and inventory control during the move, and stole nearly 2000 pages of original artwork. The artists whose work was stolen included Neal Adams, Gil Kane, Wally Wood, Jack Kirby, Berni Wrightson, and others.

As a direct result of the theft, many artists with large followings and therefore with some pull in the industry announced that they would no longer work for DC until the company recognized the artists' rights of ownership to the originals. Neal Adams and Howard Chaykin were two of the artists involved.

Over the years, however, DC's policy loosened. In 1976, when Jenette Kahn was hired as DC's publisher, one of the many pro-creator benefits she instituted was a full return of original art to the owners.

MARVEL

Upcoming guest-stars in *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* include Ant-Man, the Human Torch, She-Hulk, and Machine Man. Also, Chris Claremont is writing a two-parter for the book which will team the Thing with Spider-Woman and another character.

Upcoming features for *EPIC* include more *"Elric"* stories from Roy Thomas and Craig Russell; a medieval sorcery story by Chris Claremont and John Bolton, who are each working separately on other projects for the magazine; John Romita, Jr., is doing a "personal fantasy" story; and short stories by John Zack and Jay Muth. Also, Frank Brunner has done a cover.

Terry Austin has been named as the inker for John Byrne's *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK*. Lucasfilm has unofficially approved the first covers and plots at press time.

Marvel has announced a number of new assignments. Mike Vosburg will be the regular penciller on *TEAM AMERICA*; Carmine Infantino will pencil *IRON MAN*; Rick Leonardi will pencil the *VISION/SCARLET WITCH* mini-series (not Bill Sinkiewicz, as previously reported); Chris Claremont and Frank Miller are doing the *WOLVERINE* mini-series; and Mark Gruenwald will write and lay out the *HAWKEYE* mini-series.

Marvel asserts that John Byrne's recent change in the Thing's physical appearance is intended to be permanent.

The film *DARK CRYSTAL* will be released either on July 30 or on Thanksgiving. Marvel will time the release of its adaptation of the film (which will be done by David Anthony Kraft and Marie Severin) to match.

David Michelinie has plotted four *"Ant-Man"* stories and four *"Wonder Man"* stories (the latter to be pencilled by John Romita, Jr.). These may be run as limited series.

Marvel Comics' biography of Pope John Paul II is being drawn by John Tartaglione.

Jim Shooter states that 1981 was the "best year ever for Marvel Publishing," which "did better financially" than ever before. This is not to say that Marvel sold more copies in 1981 than ever before; Shooter said that Marvel sold more issues during the year in which *STAR WARS* came out, both due to the high sales that year of Marvel's adaptation of the *STAR WARS* series, and because Marvel published more material then. So in those terms, this is Marvel's second best year ever.

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The *Femizons*, a recreation of the Lady Liberators team from *AVENGERS #83*, will be appear in *AVENGERS #221*. There will be some membership changes, though. Instead of featuring the Wasp, Black Widow, Valkyrie, Scarlet Witch, and Madame Medusa, the new team will retain the first two heroines and replace the rest with the Invisible Girl, She-Hulk, Dazzler, and Spider-Woman. Their debut issue is produced by Jim Shooter, Bob Hall, and Dan Green.

The *HERCULES* mini-series (or "limited series," as Marvel calls them) will involve the demi-god's exile into space (under orders from Zeus). Once there, Hercules will encounter, among others, Lee and Kirby's Colonizers, who first appeared in *THOR #131*.

The *WOLVERINE* "limited series" will showcase the talents of Chris Claremont, Frank Miller, and Josef Rubinstein. It features the new X-Man's "baddest action [in his] two-fisted career."

Marvel's *ANNIE* movie adapatation was written in full script by Tom DeFalco and is being pencilled by Win Mortimer. The magazine's original artist, Dan Spiegle, had to cancel out due to the delays in Marvel's sending him the script. Marvel still has the option to do a regular *ANNIE* comic book series, but is not currently planning on doing one.

The G.I. Joe commercial, which advertises Marvel's *G.I. JOE* comic, and was produced by Marvel Productions, goes on the air March 29 and will run eight weeks. Marvel's *G.I. JOE #1* will be shipped the third week in March so as to appear around the same time as the commercial's debut. Jim Shooter calls the commercial "probably the single most important event in recent years" and says it may lead to national television advertising of Marvel's regular comics.

Marvel Entertainment has an "early pickup" for thirteen episodes of an animated *HULK* show for next year. There will also be several new episodes produced of *SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS*, and Marvel reports that there are "real possibilities" for two other series getting on the air.

One of those possibilities includes a *DAREDEVIL* animated series, with long-time comics expert Mark Evanier as head writer. Evanier reports that the show is following the general lines of Daredevil's early appearances, although none of the villains from the comics series will appear in the TV series.

GENERAL

The world of animation lost two of its most distinctive voice artists this January. Heart attacks claimed both Hans Conreid and Paul Lynde, who leave behind them a rich legacy in the field of entertainment, and voids that will never be filled in the hearts of their many fans.

Hans Conreid, who died January 5, was perhaps best-known in animation as the voice behind Snidely Whiplash, the hammy, green-tinged villain of *DUDLEY DO-RIGHT* fame. A vocal mainstay at Jay Ward Productions, Conreid also spoke for Uncle Waldo, the crafty guardian of Ward's *HOPPITY HOOPER*, and served as on-camera host of *FRACTURED FLICKERS*. In feature-length fantasy and animated films, Hans Conreid is well remembered for his florid and frequently hilarious bad guys, such as the maniacal Dr. Terwillinger in Dr. Seuss' *THE 5000 FINGERS OF DR. T*, and the role which many animation fans consider his best—the strutting, cowardly, but always explosive Captain Hook in Walt Disney's *PETER PAN*. An interesting footnote to the actor's career is that while Hook was the only animated character Conreid voiced for Disney, he did provide the visual look for the Magic Mirror in *SNOW WHITE*, some years earlier. Conreid also appeared as a live version of the Mirror in a 1977 televised Disney special.

Paul Lynde, who passed away January 11, was best known to fantasy fans as Elizabeth Montgomery's practical-joking Uncle Arthur on ABC's long-running comedy, *BEWITCHED*. But in a long career spanning nightclub, stage, and film appearances, Lynde also gained recognition as a top voice man for Hanna-Barbera. Among the characters he originated were the villainous, snickering Hooded Claw on *THE PERILS OF PENELOPE PITSTOP*; Mildew Wolf for the *"It's the Wolf!"* segment of *THE CATTANOOGA CATS*; simpering neighbor Claude Pertwee in H-B's 1970 summer prime-time series, *WHERE'S HUDDLES?*; and Templeton the Rat in the studio's feature-length treatment of E. B. White's *CHARLOTTE'S WEB*.

Both will be sorely missed.

The final contents of *DESTROYER DUCK* include:

"We've Got the Whole World in Our Hands," featuring the title character, and produced by Steve Gerber, Jack Kirby, and Alfredo Alcala.

"Gimme My Check," by Martin Pasko and Joe Staton.

"Great Moments in Comics History," by Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle

"Groo the Wanderer" by Sergio Aragones

"Thelma Ironthighs" by Shary Flenniken

Due to the extremely positive response (from distributors) to *DESTROYER DUCK #1*, Eclipse is actively investigating continuing the series. The present creative staff are each negotiating with Eclipse for a longer commitment to regular publication.

New Media's *FANTASY ILLUSTRATED* #1 will feature Mark Evanier's and Mike Sekowsky's *"Rayder"* in *"Light and Shadow," "The Djinn,"* Episode One, by Steve Englehart, Steve Ditko, Steve Leialoha, and Steve Orzechowski, and *"Risk,"* by Don McGregor and Tom Sutton. The cover will be by Craig Russell, who will also contribute interior illustrations.

According to editor Richard Howell, *FANTASY ILLUSTRATED* was the originally-scheduled home for the *"Rayder"* series, but the space wanderer's first adventure appeared in *FI*'s sister magazine, *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*, for scheduling reasons. "It was finished and came in first," explains Howell. "It fits in Howell. "It would fit in with either magazine, and its transferal helps to tie the two magazines together, like the line we want them to be. I didn't object when *'Rayder'* was relocated." *"Rayder"* is inked by Alan Gordon and lettered by Tom Orzechowski.

A sample of Steve Ditko's pencils for *"The Djinn."*

ANIMATED CHATTER

SATURDAY MORNING SEASON

Each September brings a crop of new and classic animated offerings to the Saturday morning TV screen. This year we have a few surprises, a few disappointments, and in this overview, I'll be giving my own opinions about those shows I feel are worth a look, and those I think the viewer would enjoy more by sleeping late and missing them altogether.

Working down the list network by network, I started off at CBS with *THE KWICKY KOALA SHOW*. This offering from Hanna-Barbera harkens back to that studio's old format of building a show around three individual funny-animal segments, *a la YOGI BEAR*, or *HUCKLEBERRY HOUND*, with one of the characters as the nominal star of the show. In this, the star is Kwicky Koala, a Droopy-esque little bear who can put on an extra burst of speed when the situation calls for it and escape the grasp of his nemesis, Wilfred Wolf. Kwicky was the last character developed by animation's great Tex Avery, and the title card at the beginning of each Kwicky cartoon even gives Avery a creator's credit. Hanna-Barbera is to be commended for this thoughtful tribute, but it's unfortunate that the restrictions of Saturday morning programming dilute what could be potentially uproarious segments to generally pretty tame stuff.

The other segments, I thought, came off better, probably because my expectations weren't as high for them as they were for Kwicky. These include *"Dirty Dog,"* a tramp-like, ne'er-do-well pooch, always looking to con a free meal out of an unsuspecting victim, and *"Crazy Claws,"* a wild cat who cuts down trees with a swipe of his paw, and delivers wise-cracks like Groucho Marx.

Overall, *KWICKY KOALA* has some nice touches in it (I particularly liked Crazy Claws, and wouldn't mind seeing him spun off into his own show) and is at least worth a look-see.

Goldie Gold and Action Jack

The same goes for *TROLLKINS*, another new Hanna-Barbera entry. Sort of a cross between *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* and *THE DUKES OF HAZZARD*, *TROLLKINS* concerns itself with the misadventures of the inhabitants of Trolltown, a sort of elfin version of Bedrock. The episode I saw boasted some funny gags and nice animation, and these days, that's saying a lot for any new animated show. Again, like *KWICKY*, it deserves checking out.

THE POPEYE HOUR has been retitled *THE POPEYE AND OLIVE OYL SHOW* (perhaps to give the female member of the duo a bit more exposure after Shelly Duvall's wonderful interpretation of Olive in the live *POPEYE* film) and has added two new segments, one featuring Olive and Alice the Goon (!) in the army, and another with Popeye and the Thimble Theatre gang as cavemen. Die-hard *"Popeye"* fans and small children might enjoy the re-vamped show; I didn't. I'm still waiting to see someone do THE definitive *"Popeye"* cartoons. The Fleischer series in the 1930s came close, but even they lacked the distinctive feel of the comic strip.

Next up is *BLACKSTAR*, a sword-and-sorcery series from Filmation. The stories revolve around an American astronaut, John Blackstar, who is swept through a black hole into a universe populated by dwarves, wizards, and various other fantastic creatures. On the plus side, Blackstar has some nice animation, a powerful recurring villain (the Overlord), and a generally nice look to the whole thing. On the minus side, the show has way too many characters, most of which make at least one appearance in *each* episode and tend to bog the action down. Also, there's Filmation's annoying over-reliance on uninspired voice talents. Blackstar's voice is fine, but most of the others are terrible. Unfortunately, that's a factor that detracts from most Filmation-produced shows, as they have a tendency to use the same voices over and over. My overall opinion of *BLACKSTAR:* I thought it could be worse, and was happily surprised that it wasn't.

CBS' last new show this season is *ZORRO*, also by Filmation, which makes up the second half of the awkwardly-named *TARZAN-LONE RANGER-ZORRO ADVENTURE HOUR*. *ZORRO* is a cut above *BLACKSTAR* on all levels, with better animation, particularly in some very well-executed sword-fighting scenes. The

fact that there is any sword-play at all is encouraging, and maybe a sign that the networks are changing their position about the nature of "violence" on Saturday morning. To make shows like *ZORRO* and the *LONE RANGER* work, their distinctive weapons must be shown and utilized. Hopefully, a happy medium will be reached between the producers and writers of these adventure shows, and the network department of standards and practices, which might allow for more creative give-and-take, and better shows all the way around.

Moving on to NBC, I found a nice surprise in Hanna-Barbera's *SMURFS*, an hour-long series based on the tiny blue elf-like creations of the French comics artist, Peyo. Having read the original *"Smurf"* stories long before seeing the Hanna-Barbera version, I was delighted to find much of Peyo's Walt Kelly-ish humor transplanted intact into the animated series. There were small changes made with the original stories adapted by veteran writer Len Jenson and Chuck Menville, but by and largely, they were changes for the better, such as making the mostly identical Smurfs more distinguishable, and the addition of the female Smurfette as a permanent member of the cast. Also, *SMURFS* has a few other bonuses, such as a lovely use of color and stylization, and a classically-derived musical score, in which the trained ear can catch snatches of musical scores by Tchaikovsky used as signature themes for the Smurfs, or their enemy, the evil wizard, Gargamel. All these extra little bits add up to a show which is, if nothing else, well-thought out and well-crafted. And while there may not be a whole lot here to attract older viewers or non-Smurf fans, it is one of the few "children's shows" that actually deserves to be called charming.

The same, however, can in no way be said about *THE KID SUPER POWER HOUR*, another entry from Filmation. My feelings for this show can best be summed up in one time-worn, but still effective phrase: Booo! The *KSPH* is a confusing grab-bag of elements which features two animated segments of a new cartoon series, *"Hero High,"* a training school of junior-grade super-heroes, and a half-hour animated *"Shazam!"* segment, starring DC's Marvel family. This is all wrapped up with live footage of the *"Hero High"* cast cavorting in front of an audience of kids who have been prompted to scream with delight to the Heroes' dumb, *dumb, dumb* "comic" dialogue. The ineptitude of these live sequences is totally beyond belief! The youthful, energetic cast that portrays the Hero High gang is given nothing to do except mug to the camera and deliver stupid gags that have been lifted directly from old joke books. The prevailing myth that kids like that sort of thing must by now be exploded, for in preparation for this article, I asked nine kids who had seen the show (whose ages ranged from 6 to 11), what they thought of the live segments, and their opinions ranged from "Queer!" to "Stupid!" to "Really bad!", although it's interesting to note that almost all of them (as well as some older viewers who had seen the show) expressed a liking for a bizarre character named Punk Rock, an ultra-cool punk rocker who sports Devo glasses and a purple mohawk hair-cut.

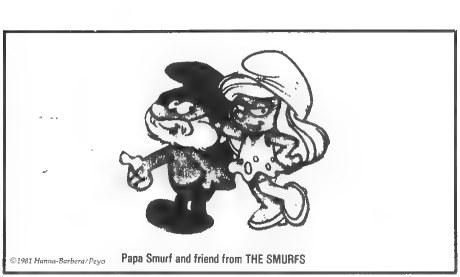
Generally, it is the animated pices that are the best received. *"Hero High"* is standard stuff, a lot like the Archie gang in super suits. *"Shazam!"* features scripts by *COMICS FEATURE*'s Paul Dini, among others, and the tone of this segment is kept pretty close to the comic book. In addition to Captain Marvel (and Billy Batson), Mary Marvel and Cap. Jr. are present, along with Uncle Dudley and Mr. Tawny. Villains so far have included Dr. Sivana, Mr. Mind, Ibac, and the Crocodile-Men from the old *"Monster Society"* stories (sporting Lacoste shirts with little alligators on them, no less!). Again, the two elements that usually hamstring Filmation's better-intentioned efforts show through here (cheap-looking animation and bad voices), and *"Shazam!"* comes across as maybe 60% of what it could be.

©1981 Filmation

The cast of THUNDARR

Two more new series wind up NBC's Saturday morning. They are Hanna-Barbera's *SPACE STARS*, and Marvel Entertainment's own *SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS*. *SPACE STARS* is really a lovely piece of work, both in terms of stories and animation. Here we are presented with all new adventures of *"SPACE GHOST"* and *"THE HERCULOIDS,"* two of H-B's all-time greatest sci-fi/action series. Add to this a new segment, *"TEEN FORCE"* and some comedy by way of *"ASTRO AND THE SPACE DOGS,"* and you have one well-constructed hour of entertainment. What makes it doubly entertaining is that there are frequent cross-overs between segments, with the Teen Force coming in to lend a collective hand to Space Ghost in an episode of that hero's adventure, and later hvaing Space Ghost return the favor when he makes a guest appearance to help the Teen Force battle a foil cosmic bad guy Uglarr (probably the best name ever conceived for a Saturday morning villain). It seems to me that everyone involved with *SPACE STARS* had a great time working again with Space Ghost and the Herculoids, and that enthusiasm carried over into the product that appears on the screen. This is a show that strives for and hits a high level of quality in writing, animation, and voice work, and I strongly recommend it.

SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS also enjoys some fine animation, but adapting the Marvel-style storytelling to the restrictive Saturday morning format is this show's main hinderance. But it's not so much the loss of a lot of comic book action that hampers the show so much as the loss of the simple drama which is a mainstay of most Marvel titles. One of the reasons Spider-Man worked (for me, anyway) in comics was the outside conflicts he had to deal with in his personal life; *i.e.* bullying from Flash Thompson, financial battles with Jonah Jameson, and women problems with Gwen and Mary Jane. Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned characters appear or are mentioned within the context of the current show. Aunt May is present, primarily to run a boarding house for Peter Parker and two of his classmates, who are, in reality, the super-heroes Iceman and Firestar. With two other super characters to share the spotlight, Spider-Man's own role as a dramatic character (or even, sadly, an interesting one) is greatly diminished. Sure, he has his share of wisecracks and glib dialogue (as well as a cheery running rivalry with



©1981 Hanna-Barbera/Peyo Papa Smurf and friend from THE SMURFS

Iceman over Firestar) but most of the old Marvel conflict is missing.

Still, under the auspices of Marvel itself, which is producing the series from their newly-acquired animation studio, *SPIDER-MAN* is handled much better here than anywhere else. It is far superior to the Bakshi-directed cartoons of the mid-1960s, and head and shoulders above DePatie-Freleng's pathetic attempt at the Fantastic Four three years ago.

One nice Marvel-inspired touch that cross-over lovers will enjoy are the frequent guest-star appearances made by heroes and villains from other Marvel titles. Recent episodes have featured Dr. Doom, the Green Goblin, and Sunfire, with guest shots from the Hulk, the Red Skull, and the X-Men expected in the future.

Over to ABC, viewers are greeted with a number of returning shows (*FONZ, THUNDARR, RICHIE RICH*) and one notable addition, *GOLDIE GOLD. GOLDIE*, a new entry from Ruby-Spears, the producers of last year's popular *THUNDARR*, depicts the adventures of the world's richest teen-ager (or young woman; she could pass for either) and her friend and companion, Action Jack Travis, a newspaper reporter. Using Goldie's vast wealth, they track down evil-doers and super-villains all over the world in a series that is as much a spoof of adventure shows than an actual representative of that genre. Created in part by Steve Gerber and Marty Pasko, and designed by Jack Kirby, Goldie (like Thundarr) is another in the line of animated characters that can trace their heritage back to comics. And it is their comics-derived sense of storytelling and design that make *GOLDIE* different from (and in some ways better than) a lot of the animated competition. The dialogue is snappy and fresh, and nobody but Kirby could dream up outlandish things like submarines with tennis courts in them, or Goldie's mansion-satellite in outer space. Goldie, in addition, is blessed with the most marvelous extravagance of all: a constantly changing wardrobe. Any animator knows that re-drawing an established character in a different set of clothes is an expensive and time-consuming chore, which is why most producers balk at doing a story which has the lead character wearing anything but their usual attire. Even having a character take off his hat causes a lot of trouble. Yet, in one episode, Goldie went blithely from an evening gown to an explorer's outfit, to a tennis dress, to a worker's uniform, to her usual gold jeans and mink coat. Now that's extravagant!

The *"Goldie"* scripts so far have all been gems Ms. Gold herself would be proud of. My only carps are with Ruby-Spears' sometimes flat and one-dimensional lay-out design (which also creeps into *THUNDARR* on occasion) and their innocuous and uninspired musical scores. These should be worked on.

And that's about it for the new shows. Unfortunately, one other new entry, *LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY IN THE ARMY*, has not aired as of this writing, and I may do a piece on it later in the year. One returning veteran to the Saturday morning scene that everybody should know about is *BULLWINKLE*, which airs over NBC in the early afternoon in most cities. (Check local listings.) Like fine wine, the Moose grows better with age. The whole gang is here once more: Rocky, Boris, Natasha, Peabody and Sherman, and, as always, Dudley Do-Right, Nell, and her heart-throb, Horse. Who says there's no room for sophisticated entertainment on network TV?●

It would not only be obvious (not to say puerile) to refer to Mary Jo Duffy as the most accomplished female writer of modern super-hero comics, it's a damn silly limitation in judging her talents. In her (thus far) short career as an editor and writer at Marvel Comics, she has won the praise of her co-workers for her professional dedication to the creative development of Marvel's *TARZAN, DOCTOR STRANGE, DAREDEVIL* (Duffy was the editor who assigned Frank Miller to that series), and even such immediately unlikely projects as *THE SHE-HULK* and *ROM*, where her highly developed story sense served to structure and streamline the story flow. Today, Duffy's editorial acumen is directed towards Marvel's big-budget *EPIC ILLUSTRATED* magazine, on which she serves as Associate Editor.

Perhaps Duffy's most obvious achievement is the transformation of the arguably-unworkable and potentially tedious *POWER MAN/IRON FIST* comics series into the well-plotted, wonderfully-characterized, highly entertaining (now-) monthly surprise package it has become. Duffy's position —having inherited an unformed amalgamation including one character whose low-selling series demanded realistic and street-gritty (and generally unmarketably so) detection-oriented stories, and another character whose previous writer/artist team commanded highly partisan loyalties to *their* version of the character (while rejecting the work of any other creators)—was not an enviable one. With patience, craftsmanship, and real insight, though, she managed to render each of the principals (including major supporting characters) with equal parts faithfulness and progressive development, and slowly but surely make them her own. Although this is most apparent with Duffy's humanizations of the frantically macho Daughters of the Dragon and the emotionally-underdeveloped Bob Diamond (of the *"Sons of the Tiger"*), her deft touch is also apparent through Luke Cage's wry acceptance of Heroes-for-Hire-Inc.'s glamorous high-society setting, and with Danny Rand's delightful discoveries in Luke's world of 42nd Street. Duffy's understanding and skill in depicting her protagonists is never clearer than when she depicts them together, comparing and contrasting their (literally) worlds-apart upbringings and outlooks. Duffy's world for *POWER MAN/IRON FIST* is all of a piece; amazingly so since she began with two such uncomplementary components. Far from being an obvious marketing "have-to" to perpetuate the exposure of two failing characters, *POWER MAN/IRON FIST* under Mary Jo Duffy is a series Marvel Comics should be eager to acknowledge it as one of the most craftsmanlike, entertaining, and enjoyable series in their line.

—*Richard Howell*

An Interview with *MARY JO DUFFY*

characters ©1981 Marvel Comics Group

KALISH: You were an old comics fan, it seems.
DUFFY: Yes.
KALISH: How is it, being a college student and a comics fan at the same time?
DUFFY: Absolutely great. I hadn't really been a comics fan that long, though. I read them as a kid, but I didn't get seriously interested in comics until I was well into my senior year of high school. So it was a very fresh thing to me when I was at Wellesley, and it was sort of nice, because I had my academic work, but then I also had this nice bookcase full of diversion right there with me, and it made me terribly popular with other girls in the dorm, who either had interests in that direction, or who had a term paper the next morning and a boyfriend that they wanted to keep out of their hair. Y'know, as long as they didn't break the bindings, anybody who wanted to could come in and read my

comics. I thought I was going to be a lawyer when I got out of school—I had no interest in being a writer—so the result was that unlike now, where I do it and I like it but it's a responsibility, then it was just pure diversion.

KALISH: What got you started in your senior year? Was it anything in particular, or just this sudden bursting vision of four-color. . .?

DUFFY: Two things happened at once. One was, I saw *JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR*. . . this is a long story. . .

KALISH: I've heard *J.C. SUPERSTAR* blamed for many things, but never before for a comics habit.

DUFFY: Well, I saw it on Broadway and really liked it, and I remembered that there'd been an article in *TIME* magazine about it, about the time it opened. So I decided to poke around the house and find that issue of *TIME*, and I never found it, but I found a pile of my brother's old comic books.

KALISH: Ahh.

DUFFY: And then about two weeks later, I had wisdom teeth removed, and they gave me a general anaesthetic instead of a local, and the result was that I was really like woolly-witted for about two days afterwards, so I read comic books until my head came back into shape (laughter), and that was how it started. My brother had bought just a couple recently, after years of not buying them, which is I think why the comics were so accessible, so I read, like, all the old ones, and then he had one *FANTASTIC FOUR* and two *SUB-MARINER*s, and three *SPIDER-MAN*s, all very recent, and I read them too. And where he left off, I just kept on.

HOWELL: What year are we talking about here?

DUFFY: We're talking about. . . end of November of 1971. I started reading comics again just in time to pick up the first issue of *MARVEL TEAM-UP*.

HOWELL: And then you started writing letters in—or did that come much later?

DUFFY: That came when I was in college. My freshman year I wrote a letter or two to *THE FANTASTIC FOUR*, and then when I was a sophomore, there was an issue of *THE HULK* that I really hated. I hated it *so*—and *HULK* was a book that I liked. An issue came up that I *hated*. I hated it so much that I seethed about it for an entire evening. I chewed my nails over dinner, I told everybody at the table about it—and my friends were very tolerant (laughter), because these were the comics-borrowers, and I went through their various things with them—I told them how terrible I thought it was. And I took a bath, and during the bath I was thinking, "Ooh, if I had those editors here, here's what I'd tell them." And then I thought, "Well, why don't you?" So I got out of the bathtub, put on a robe, and wrapped a towel around my hair, and sat down at the typewriter—dripping wet—and banged it all off, and sent the letter. And as far as I was concerned, that was the end of it—and *then* they printed the letter. I firmly believe that there's no greater incentive toward writing letters than getting your first one printed, because once you've seen the first one in print, you figure, "Oh boy! I know how to get in print," and off you go.

HOWELL: I'm very curious. Which *HULK* was it?

DUFFY: Oh, it was the *HULK* where they polished off Warlock, and they were doing the crucifixion parody—and I don't mind that it was the crucifixion thing, because they'd been doing the messiah trip with Warlock all along, but I thought it was really not well done. And I still work with some of the people who worked on that, but I feel like —if you're going to redo something that's been done before, you darn well better make sure you do it better than it's been done before. I felt like that one was really clumsy and heavy-handed and stuff. When Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams put *GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW* to bed for the first time, they did a Christ figure, and a crucifixion, and what have you—but it was better done. I didn't mind that one at all. It was sort of neat. . .

HOWELL: It obviously had a lot of care put into it.

DUFFY: A lot of care, and a lot of character. The characters stayed as they were; they weren't just acting as symbols. I felt like in the *HULK* story, The Hulk and Adam Warlock and the Man-Beast and all those people were just acting out the pre-ordained Biblical roles, and they were not staying in character for themselves.

HOWELL: So it wasn't a successful allegory?

DUFFY: Well, it wasn't to me, but when Roy [Thomas] or Steve [Englehart] or whoever it was who printed my letter printed it, he mentioned that out of hundreds and hundreds of responses, I was one of only *four* people who hadn't liked it. I stand by my opinion, but apparently I was in the minority on that one.

KALISH: Well, you're still in the minority; it's very rare that letter writers actually eventually become editors at Marvel Comics. How did that come about?

DUFFY: Well, actually, I don't consider myself in such a minority. When I was in college, I started writing letters to, oh, five or six people—a couple of whom, granted, you may never have heard of, and a couple of whom I *wish* I had never heard of—but the people I wrote to most were, like... I'd met Ralph Macchio, and Mark Gruenwald, who work here now, and I corresponded regularly with Dean Mullaney, currently at Eclipse Enterprises, Kim Thompson of *THE COMICS JOURNAL*, and Bob Rodi, who is still doing letters, and is turning into a very fine novelist, albeit an unpublished one. So I feel like somehow or other, I wound up in a little group for some reason that was destined to go on and continue to do things in the comics and writing biz.

KALISH: This was a group that was primarily through correspondence?

DUFFY: All through correspondence. Dean was in Staten Island, Bob was in college, moving around a lot. I was in Massachusetts or New York depending, and Kim was moving around Europe at the time, and we were correspondents with each other for three or four years before any of us met. And we just picked each others' addresses out of the lettercols, and off we went.

HOWELL: Was there a fanzine that was generated by this group?

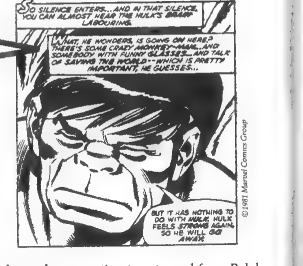
DUFFY: That was some of the people I was talking about who you might not have heard of. We did one issue of something called *WOWEEKAZOWIE*. . .

HOWELL: That's it!

DUFFY: You'll still hear of it occasionally. We'd talked about doing one for years, and it ultimately wound up in the hands—wouldn't you know it—of exactly the people who went on *not* to become professionals. And I think they still produce it. I kind of wonder how, because everybody who was really associated with it in the beginning lost touch. Afterwards I heard accusations of financial misappropriations, and I know that I was really editorially dissatisfied with the way some people I'd never even heard of were treating my submissions to the thing, so I worked on, like, one issue, and Dean and Kim and Bob may have worked on two apiece, but it never really got off the ground. As a matter of fact, the one issue I did work on managed to come to print just as I came to work for Marvel—in time to put a few professional noses out of joint over things I said when I was a fan and hadn't met them.

KALISH: Timing.

"If you're going to redo something that's been done before, you darn well better make sure you do it better than it's been done before."



(Transcriber's Note: In case anyone's interested, *WOW-EEKAZOWIE* has run four issues so far, and it seems like no more are coming. If Rich actually did see one seven months ago, then I haven't got my sub copy yet. #4 came out in early 1979, I believe. Anyway, #1 was edited and published by Willie Blyberg, and along with Jack Frost, Peter Iro and KJ Robbins contributed to the group Duffy mentions. #2 was edited and published by Dean Mullaney, and Jo Duffy had an article in it, *"Feminism and the Ready-Made Superwoman."* #3 and #4 appeared after a year and a half, and were both put out by Pete Iro. And that seems to be it.)

DUFFY: Well, it wasn't like the fanzines we have now. There was no *COMICS JOURNAL* or *COMICS FEATURE* or anything, there was not this easy intimacy between the fans and the pros—the fan publishers and the pros. We were sitting there in our respective college dormitories or what have you, extrapolating from what we read in letter columns, and what we heard at conventions and stuff, and we didn't have access to the kind of information and background that you guys get as a matter of course.

KALISH: Yeah. It's a very very different world now. So you graduated from Wellesley with the intention of becoming a lawyer—what happened?

DUFFY: Well, in my senior year, the intention of being a lawyer had finally gone out the window. I suddenly realized that much as I liked the idea of myself as the defender of justice and what-have-you, I really did *not* like the long hours in the law library, and I especially disliked many of the particular sub-group of my fellow students who were going to become lawyers, and I kind of said, "Hey, wait a minute! These are the people who are going to be my professional associates for the rest of my life. Maybe I better think about this." So the idea at the time was for me to take a year off, and get a job, and then take the law boards and go to law school after a year if I was still of the same mind. And wouldn't you know it, and this was just a coincidence, I wound up getting a job in a law office, which convinced me, absolutely and unutterably that interested as I was in the law, and much as I like and respect most of the lawyers I know, it was not the life for me. But it was a proofreading job, and by that time, Ralph had gotten up to Marvel—and as I said, I didn't really know him, but we had some good sort of fan buddies in common—and I imposed grossly on the connection to get word from Ralph about when jobs were open, and I applied for a proofreading job. I didn't get it at the time, but four months later, just when I was ready to start throwing lawyers out twenty-fourth-story windows, I got a phone call from Archie Goodwin, and he said there was not a proofreading job open, but there was something else, and if I'd take it, he'd give me a shot at the next editorial opening that came up.

HOWELL: What was the editorial opening?

DUFFY: Well, the job that I got was returning original artwork, which is a great job to have. It's not as good now as it used to be, but in those days, writers got pages, inkers got pages, pencillers got pages, and they all got to select what they got. And it was still a big deal for people to be getting their pages back. Marvel and DC had only been doing it for a couple of years. Nowadays, the pages are given back forcibly, random distribution, no pages to the writer, and it's the luck of the draw. But in those days, *everybody* wanted to know the person who was giving them back their artwork, so my first week on the job, I was meeting Gil Kane and I was meeting George Perez, and Jack Kirby was phoning me—well, not exactly frantically, 'cause I can't imagine him getting frantic, but he was phoning me with concern, from California wondering where his *CAPTAIN AMERICA* pages were. And Chris Claremont was coming in and complaining that all he ever got was the T-shirts-and-jeans-around-the-mansion pages, and never any of the pages of The X-Men in costume—I mean, it was a really great way to meet people, because I had something that they wanted, and. . .

KALISH: True, it was theirs. . . (laughter)

DUFFY: Yes, but I had access to it. And how well and how efficiently I did my job was directly reflected in how soon they got their pages. Also when people come in to see an editor, there's a certain tension, y'know, they might be worrying about, "Well, is he going to remember that I owe him 17 pages of *ROM*?" or something, but when people come in to see anybody who does a clerical type of job, then they just relax. They hang out, and as a matter of fact, to this day, some of the best friends I have in this business are people who would come in and shoot the breeze with me while I was stamping up their pages for copyright.

HOWELL: Sounds like one of the focal points of the office.

DUFFY: Yeah, it doesn't really work that way any more—

as near as I can tell—because the whole system of distribution has changed, but at the time it was *the* place to be.

KALISH: And then Archie followed up on his promise when the next editorial position opened up?

DUFFY: Yeah. I'm sure there was a lot going on behind the scenes that I don't know of, that I don't want to know of, but all I know is that the next time one of the assistant editors left, I bit my fingernails for about ten days and then got the assistant editorship.

HOWELL: And that was. . . ?

DUFFY: Four years ago. To the day.

HOWELL: Happy anniversary. (Laughter)

DUFFY: It just occurred to me, because you were asking. It was May 5, 1977 that I got that job.

HOWELL: And of which books did you become assistant editor?

DUFFY: Well, at that time, Archie was Editor-in-Chief. There was only one associate editor under him—Jim Shooter—and the books were kind of in a pool, handled by the assistant editors. But we got very territorial about them, like we had a deal that everybody would get one Kirby book, and I wanted *DEVIL DINOSAUR*, so I got to be assistant editor of *DEVIL DINOSAUR*. . .

KALISH: You were a *DEVIL DINOSAUR* fan?

DUFFY: Oh, I *loved DEVIL DINOSAUR*! Those were the happiest days of my life!

HOWELL: A kindred spirit?

KALISH: You're the only other person we know of who will admit to a liking of *DEVIL DINOSAUR*.

DUFFY: *DEVIL DINOSAUR* was the book the pros preferred.

KALISH and HOWELL (incredulously): Really?

DUFFY: Just ask Walt Simonson, or Weezie Jones. *You'll* hear *DEVIL DINOSAUR* fans.

So I had *DEVIL DINOSAUR*, anything that Chris Claremont wrote. And I was Marv Wolfman's staff liaison, he was still a writer/editor at the time, and I worked on staff, doing his proofreading and things for him when he wasn't in the office. So that was about my workload. Oh, and *MAN FROM ATLANTIS* too, because I watched the show (laughter).

KALISH: Had to have some sort of familiarity with what was going on?

DUFFY: Well, it helped. I got to interview Patrick Duffy, although the book got cancelled before the interview was published, and he went on to do *DALLAS*. That was one of the big thrills of my life at the time.

When Archie Goodwin gave up the Editor-in-Chief-ship ...Editorship-in-Chief?... Jim Shooter took over, and decided that he was going to really consolidate the sub-groupings, so that there would be several associate editors under him (at about that time, they dropped the term "associate"), and each editor would have an assistant. And the editors would be doing jobs that had previously been done by other department heads; whereas before we had an art director, the editors were now responsible for the art and the coloring and what-have-you. And the assistants went right on doing the proofreading and the letter columns and the reprint books. The first person he hired to be my boss was Bob Hall, and I worked for Bob Hall for six months, and then Bob Hall quit, and Allen Milgrom was hired. DC Comics had just let Allen Milgrom and Larry Hama—among other people—go. Maybe they had a good reason for it, but I cannot see a comic book company letting editorial talent like that get away. Allen was available, so he became my next boss. Allen was really great to work for, because he understood that I not only yearned for responsibility, but I was getting a little bit crazy without it. So he gave me two or three books besides the reprints to do on my own, and one of them was *TARZAN*. *TARZAN* was doing well and I liked doing *TARZAN*, and I liked working with Bill [Mantlo] and Sal [Buscema], but when Marvel ceased to have public relations with the Burroughs people—I'm not exactly sure what went on there—I knew that we were trying to keep *TARZAN* without *JOHN CARTER*, but they said "No, you have to do them both," and we lost *TARZAN*. The thing is, that left Bill and Sal a book light, and me a book light, and then the Parker Brothers people came to us and said, "This is Rom. He is a Spaceknight. These are the noises he makes, and these are his toys. He fights Dire Wraiths. What is his story?" and handed us this toy (laughter) and Jim Shooter and Bill Mantlo and I went out to lunch a bunch of times, and hammered out—given the term "Spaceknight," enemy "Dire Wraith," and the variety of toys and noises that Rom had. . . (Howell quietly snickers through this). . . well, I mean, come *on*! That's what we were working with! He's got a noise that goes "Beep beep beep beep beep," and he's got (a strange sound like heavy breathing). We were given the name of the hero, and the name of the villain, without being told what they do, and this series of weapons and noises.

HOWELL: Were you ever shown a Dire Wraith, or did they just say "He fights Dire Wraiths. Make up what they look like."

"We were given the name of the hero, and the name of the villain, without being told what they do..."

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KALISH: They don't have a Dire Wraith toy.

DUFFY: We not only had to make up what they look like, we had to figure out what could possibly be so wrong with them that he's fighting them. . .

KALISH: All the time.

DUFFY: And constantly.

KALISH: With no respite.

DUFFY: No, he takes an occasional rest. In issue #73 of *POWER MAN/IRON FIST*, he punches out Power Man and Iron Fist. So anyway, we came up with the basis of the whole series. Jim was really instrumental in contributing the idea of the 1950s horror-movie-paranoia mood—which got really misinterpreted by certain crazy subgroups of people. The idea was that we were trying to play the Dire Wraiths like the Nazis or somebody *terribly* evil and rotten, and we began getting mail from people claiming that the Dire Wraiths were an *oppressed minority*, and that we were. . .

HOWELL: Affirmative Action groups!!

DUFFY: Yes! Yes! We were getting Dire Wraith Affirmative Action mail, where people were accusing us of being racist and bigots.

KALISH: Because you didn't like evil aliens! (Laughter)

DUFFY: Well, we had invented these people, and the letters were stating like, "Obviously, this is just a symbolism for Italians," or "this is just a symbolism for black people," or "a symbolism for Jews, and you people are really bigoted racists at heart, and you're creating your own minority. . ." and the whole idea was supposed to be that the Wraiths were rotten, terrible, awful. They were the kind of characters who would *oppress* a minority, not be one. We were trying to figure out what could we possibly show them doing that could make them bad enough to justify Rom hating them.

KALISH: In a Code-approved comic.

DUFFY: Right. That's a problem. Like, "they're putting fluoride in the water, they're killing ducklings. . ." (laughter)

KALISH: You should do that. (Laughter) Have the Dire Wraiths kill ducklings.

DUFFY: Oh, Al Milgrom came up with the most inimitable sound effect of a duckling biting the dust (laughter). Bill and I were sitting there trying desperately to come up with second, third, and fourth issue plots (Jim co-plotted the first issue with us), and take notes, and Al would sit there going, "QUKKKKKK! Oh my God! Another one got it! QUKKKKK!" (Mad laughter on the part of everyone.) "Ohh, another baby duckling bites the dust!" Completely unproductive.

KALISH: But you must have really firmed up the Dire Wraith personality.

DUFFY: Oh, absolutely and utterly. They're just a rotten bunch. Bill is such a humanitarian at heart that he really cannot sustain a villain for very long, without keeping in his mind what's wrong with them. As a matter of fact, in *ROM*—and it's a good idea—we've had Dire Wraiths who were good. I mean, we established—I say, "we," I'm not even working on the book any more, although I wish I was —that there are aberration Wraiths, who are very nice, and that evil is not a genetic thing. It's just that, by and large, they're a *rotten bunch*. So Bill needed this. . . *something* along the lines of fluoride and baby ducks, just to keep him focused on the fact that these were our *bad* guys, and that Rom was not some sanctimonious Captain Aryan in a tin suit, who's going to keep the world clean for his race. He actually had a good reason for wanting to be after these people.

HOWELL: That certainly comes through, on an issue-by-issue basis.

DUFFY: I am so pleased that *ROM* is doing well. I enjoyed working on it, and in fact, I hesitated about giving up the assistant editorship with Allen, just because I didn't want to give up *ROM* because I knew I'd miss that so much. Now I just sit back and enjoy reading it—and I couldn't be more delighted. I feel like Bill in his early days was kind of under-rated—I feel like people are appreciating him now—but Sal, who's been one of the backbones of Marvel for years and years and years, has just been grossly under-rated. And the stuff he does on *ROM*—I'd look at it with an editor's eye, and I'd remember the plot, and I'd just be so delighted. It was obvious that he really puts thought into it, and is *into* it, and to see him finally getting some recognition for the kind of work he does is really nice.

HOWELL: Bill noted when we talked to him this morning that he was very pleased to see different people (like Steve Gerber and Steve Englehart) in different interviews telling the world how much they loved to work with Sal Buscema.

DUFFY: Well, it is about time. I want to know why people weren't saying this years ago. Sal has been one of my great joys at Marvel. It's very scary to come in as a fan, and sud-

denly *be* the person who has to call somebody and say, "Redraw 2½ pages and you're behind deadline." You just want to crawl into a hole if it's one of your favorites. I've never had to really chew Sal out, but it's very intimidating to be saying "When can we have those pages?" and "Could you do so-and-so on your next job?" but he is always just such a pleasure to talk to—always cheerful, always nice, and if he has a gripe, then he doesn't just whine and moan, he tells you what it is, and approaches things intelligently. He's really a nice person to deal with. Some super-stars can be really obnoxious (laughter). He goes beyond professional all the way to pleasant.

HOWELL: Now you mentioned reading *ROM* with an editor's eye, and also just reading it as a reader. Do you find that you tend to notice and register certain qualities now that you've been an editor, that you might not have been quite as aware of back when you were reading for your own pleasure and had no official contact with the industry?

DUFFY: Chiefly on books that I worked on. It's a real problem. I understand why somebody who's done something that they've really put a lot into will refuse to look at it and read it for a long afterwards after somebody else takes over from them. It's a struggle with me sometimes not to go running in to Allen and say, "They shouldn't be doing this and this is wrong and what-have-you," but you have to turn that off, you have to just accept what you're told and read it for pleasure. I think, as a fan, I always had editorial instincts—I think that's what finally got me up here—but they were intuitive, my own internal sense of what worked and what didn't, and what I liked and what I didn't. When I got up here I learned the principles that underlay the institution, and I learned how to put a name to what had just been a feeling before. I learned why some things that I might be in favor of really do not work in a professional way.

KALISH: Bill Mantlo said that he's always been impressed by your ability to pinpoint story points, in an editorial sense, and to provide needed guidance when the story was getting out of hand, and we were wondering whether or not that was because you were well aware of those elements of storytelling that have to be in every good story, or whether or not it was something that was trained here at Marvel.

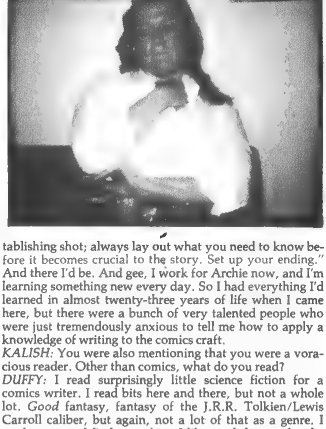
DUFFY: Okay. Given that I have that ability—and I appreciate Bill saying it and you passing it on—just for the sake of argument, let's say he's right about that. . . .

KALISH: Okay.

DUFFY: . . . I think that it's both, because I. . . I didn't just suddenly get interested in writing because I was interested in comics; I've been interested in writing all my life. I'm a really voracious reader. But also, when I got up here, there were very handy people like Jim Shooter, Stan Himself, Archie, and now Denny O'Neil, who could give it to me in a sentence, y'know? Stan would say things like, "Never have a serious premise that is too complicated to explain in one sentence." I mean, I sort of knew that in a general way, I'd say, "Well, it's getting convoluted, or it's getting contrived or something," but Stan gave me the one sentence rule. And this isn't graven in stone, but what an intelligent way of putting things!

And Denny: his very first day editing *POWER MAN*, I went in to him with a plot, and he liked the plot. Then he told me a little anecdote about how to make a story exciting. And it was just an anecdote, it wasn't a lecture—he didn't get pedantic or anything—but it was a turning point. He suddenly told me in one sentence something that I had been groping for in my two-and-a-half years in the business at the time. And Jim Shooter, he'd say, "give me an establishing shot; always lay out what you need to know before it becomes crucial to the story. Set up your ending." And there I'd be. And gee, I work for Archie now, and I'm learning something new every day. So I had everything I'd learned in almost twenty-three years of life when I came here, but there were a bunch of very talented people who were just tremendously anxious to tell me how to apply a knowledge of writing to the comics craft.

"It's very scary to come in as a fan, and suddenly have to *be* the person who has to call somebody and say, 'Redraw 2½ pages and you're behind deadline.' "



KALISH: You were also mentioning that you were a voracious reader. Other than comics, what do you read?

DUFFY: I read surprisingly little science fiction for a comics writer. I read bits here and there, but not a whole lot. *Good* fantasy, fantasy of the J.R.R. Tolkien/Lewis Carroll caliber, but again, not a lot of that as a genre. I tend to try and find something I like, and then go for the best of it. I love mysteries. I haven't read much John D. MacDonald or Dashiell Hammett or what-have-you, but I've read every mystery Dorothy L. Sayers has written, and I am just on my nineteenth Dick Francis book in seven weeks. Oh, I can't talk enough about Dick Francis and his writing! And I like romance, but as far as Regency romances go, I read everything by Georgette Heyer and almost nothing by anybody else, and I love Mary Stewart's writing. Everything she's written is okay with me. And

Madeleine L'Engle—she's another fantasy writer I'm very excited about. And then there's Alistair MacLean thrillers, Helen MacInnes' espionage novels, books by Barbara Michaels and Elizabeth Peters—who are the same person. . . an American Mary Stewart type but with a very strong archaeological background—and then Shakespeare.

KALISH: Great storytellers all.

DUFFY: I think so. I just named the very cream of the people I like that I can think of off-hand.

KALISH: You were mentioning that you always had at the back of your mind, whether or not it was conscious or unconscious, an interest in writing, something that you've actually been doing here at Marvel. . .

DUFFY: . . . or I wouldn't be here any more.

KALISH: Really?

DUFFY: Yes.

KALISH: So editing wouldn't be enough, it has to be writing as well?

DUFFY: I like editing very much, but when I first took it I only saw the editorial job as my sole means of getting writing assignments. That was way back in the days of the art-work returns. I had no plans of ever taking a staff job, except as a means to an end, and it surprised me when I wound up liking and even having a certain aptitude for the means.

KALISH: So how is it to actually write a comic book? Is it appreciably different from, say, what you as a fan of six years ago would have thought it would have been like?

DUFFY: Yes. The very first time I came up here, it was on tour. I had imposed on a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend's sort of knowing Stan, and gotten up here. I think Archie wasn't the Editor-in-Chief yet then, but he was somebody fairly important, and he happened to be one of the people who got stuck with seeing that I was taken care of while I was here, and he suggested that, if I was interested in trying writing, why didn't I try this? Then he handed me some xeroxes of pages. Now, granted, it was tougher than it might have been, because I didn't have the plot to go with them—all I had was the pages. He said, "Well, why don't you try writing the dialogue and captions for these, and see how it goes?" I took those things home, and I looked at them, and I was going, "What *is* this? What do you do? Where do you go from here?" And I could sort of see border notes, so I had a general idea of what was going on, but I hadn't the faintest idea in the world how the story was supposed to progress. Now, somebody else had done that plot—it would have helped if I'd known what the plot was—but I had no idea in the world how you went from paced-out pencils to a coherent comics story. The first one I worked on up here was a little bit better because I sat in on the plot of that one. I got the pencils, and went to Jim Shooter and said, "What do I do now?" and he said, "Figure out how much space you've got, and then write that much."

HOWELL: (Laughter) It sounds so simple.

DUFFY: Yeah, well, that was more than I'd learned my first go-round on my own, with the xeroxes.

HOWELL: "Don't write more than the panels can hold?"

DUFFY: Yes. That was my first lesson. Very valuable. I've occasionally bent the rules a little since then, but then, one must.

KALISH: Is writing a completely cooperative effort with you, or do you write with your artist in mind?

DUFFY: Well, it depends on the artist. One of the first things I learned, and I'm certainly not going to name any names here, was about idiot-proofing. Early on, I was a beginning writer, and there were mistakes I was making, and wouldn't you know that they gave me some beginning artists, some of whom were very good and some of whom were awful—one of them went on to become Frank Miller. His first Marvel story was my third.

HOWELL: Who went on to become—?

DUFFY: Yes, well, that's sort of how we both feel about that story now. But I found out that if I made a mistake in my pacing, or even left any room for doubt in a description, that if I got the wrong artist, he would just take it and go to town with it. You can learn much more from working with a bad artist than you can from a good one, because you learn what *not* to do. You learn exactly what to be explicit about. So if I don't know who I'm working with, I tend to go with the idiot-proofing, and then put a note on it like, "There's lots of leeway in this, but don't change anything unless we discuss it."

On the other hand, I've been working with Kerry Gammill for a couple of years now. Working with Kerry is great, because I know about what to give him, and what I'll get, and he reads the plot and knows what he can take liberties with and what he can give me. That's where a lot of the humor in the book comes from. With a different artist, a lot of the silly things that we do together would really just lie there and die, but I plot every issue knowing that he's going to be the artist, and that he can pull off four panels of Iron Fist in a motorboat, zipping around in the background with no relation to the foreground action. When I plotted that, I amused myself typing up the plot by thinking, "Gee, Iron Fist doesn't know how to drive the boat, I bet you he'll be yawing all over the place," and I put that into the plot, and Kerry's got action in the foreground, Luke Cage looming all over and menacing a poor little frightened thug, but in the background, you've got Iron Fist in silhouette, zipping along at top speed, going in a different direction every time you see him. I wouldn't have done that if I hadn't known that I had Kerry to work with.

HOWELL: I think the rapport that you and Kerry have is even more remarkable, considering Kerry told me he'd never met you.

DUFFY: No, Kerry and I have never met, but the phone wires groan under our conversations every month or so, and he sends me pictures of him, and of his baby son, and videotapes of himself on TV, and it's like he's his own press agent. Whenever he's in the newspaper or something, he sends me a clipping of it, and I love it. I love seeing what he's doing and stuff, and I guess he can follow me in. . . well, now in *COMICS FEATURE* or wherever.

KALISH: Exactly, exactly. *"Get the big inside scoop on Jo Duffy!"*

HOWELL: Right, he told us, when we get the interview done, send him a copy.

KALISH: What was it like inheriting two characters—especially two characters whose partnership you had to build almost from scratch?

DUFFY: Well, it was great, because Power Man and Iron Fist separately were two of my very favorite Marvel characters. I came up here like every fan, and I wanted to do the books that I had liked. . . *THE X-MEN*, for example. I imagine now that they also want to do *DAREDEVIL* and *IRON MAN*, because I've noticed that the kids look at what is being done well, and want to do it. And for a pro, that's dumb. Like, Chris is writing *THE X-MEN*, and I like the way he's writing *THE X-MEN*, so why the hell would I want to do it? If I have any sense, I'll save myself some work, and just sit back and enjoy his. *POWER MAN/IRON FIST*, on the other hand, I felt like had gotten off the track. I mean, I loved a lot of what Chris and John [Byrne] did with *IRON FIST*, and I loved Archie's *POWER MAN*, and there were stories along the way that I also liked—like some of McGregor's I thought were excellent—but I felt

"Editorially, people hadn't gotten used to the idea of them as a team."

like when I took them over, both characters just kind of—they were in *muck*. They were just in this morass of "What do we do now?" Chris had never found a direction for them jointly, and then [Ed] Hannigan had inherited these two characters with long histories but no real current direction, and hadn't quite figured out where to take them, and I would sit there every month, really covetously, thinking, "If they were mine to write, you know what *I'd* do." It was a wish-dream: "Ooh, ooh, that's not what you do with them! *This* is what you should do with them!" Lo and behold, that was the book I got, so it was just great for me. On the other hand, I got tripped up early on, because I was a *fan*, and I wasn't approaching it cool-headedly, professionally, as a new thing. There was a certain amount of wanting to see more of the same in my first couple of issues.

KALISH: Holding on to what you had admired the most in previous incarnations?

DUFFY: It's like I was holding on to the letter of it without rising and advancing its spirit.

HOWELL: Speaking of Steve Englehart, he has said in print that when he got *THE AVENGERS*, he was so impressed with Roy Thomas' version of the book, that for several years he just wrote as closely as he could to what Roy Thomas had been doing before he finally caught on. "Gee, this isn't working. If they wanted Roy Thomas, then they should have kept him on there." You seem to have caught on to that a good deal sooner than he had in that context.

DUFFY: Well, I had to, because *THE AVENGERS* has always been a top of the line book. *POWER MAN* and *IRON FIST* were in deep water up to their respective noses when I came on the book. Iron Fist's book had been cancelled, Cage's book was not doing well, and then they went through this period of "Okay, this issue it's George Tuska, then it's going to be John Byrne, then it's going to be Lee Elias, then it's going to be Mike Zeck, then—" The book just couldn't sustain any more mucking about with it. So I guest-starred the X-Men. I used a villain I didn't even particularly care to use for the book, it was sort of forcibly suggested to me from higher up that I use The Living Monolith, and creatively I think it was a mistake, because I broke the old rule about a premise that couldn't be summed up in one sentence. But at least guest-starring the X-Men brought the sales up a little, and attracted some attention, and fortunately the issue immediately after the X-Men was El Aguila, which people liked in its own right. I feel like that was the issue where I started writing the book I wanted to write.

HOWELL: I noticed in the last issues there seemed to be a trade-off on the covers: one would have a big Iron Fist on it, and the other would have a big Luke Cage on it. Was this part of an actual experimentation in the book at the time, to see which of the two would be the stronger character for sales?

DUFFY: No. Editorially, people hadn't gotten used to the idea of them as a team. Nobody was thinking of it in terms of "Power Man *and* Iron Fist." They were thinking of it in terms of "Whose turn is it?" and it wasn't a matter of testing sales or anything, because I sat in on a lot of the discussions about the covers. I guess in a sense, though, it was a conscious thing, because we'd do an "Iron Fist" cover, and then it'd be, "Hey wait a minute, it's Power Man's book. Okay, his turn, let's put him on the cover." You go back and look, and there are a couple of them where they actually do team up, but there was a sense of "Whose turn is it?" rather than "What are *they* doing this month?"

HOWELL: Which was not reflected in the stories. . .?

DUFFY: Well, I always liked the idea of them as a team. I find it very hard to write single characters as a matter of fact. I have no problem with the idea of a protagonist, but every character who's ever really interested me has got to have somebody to talk to at least, or somebody to work with. I feel like you learn more about a character by who he or she chooses to hang around with, and how they treat their friends, than you do just listening to them soliloquize through a battle with The Red Skull.

HOWELL: And do you feel specifically that they need this character who will share in their complete life, not just, say, the friends they have when they're in their plainclothes identity?

DUFFY: Not necessarily, but it helps. Well, I mean, Power Man and Iron Fist don't do a lot of plainclothes socializing—they work together, and they obviously get along, but on the other hand, Cage given his druthers, would sooner be involved with the people he grew up with (because he is a native New Yorker) and with D.W. (who he can go to a movie with). Iron Fist, on the other hand, is of a more tortured and ethereal school of thought than Cage is, and he'll hang out with Colleen and Misty or he will seek out the Sons of the Tiger—people he has interests in common with. They can see each other socially, but they're not Siamese twins, either. I make a real effort to give them their own set of friends in the book, and make that part of their contrasts.

HOWELL: Do you feel you had to modify any of the book's characters any, to make the teamwork mesh?

DUFFY: Yes. I feel like I had to tell Colleen Wing and Mis-

"I feel like I had to tell Colleen Wing and Misty Knight that now that there were two protagonists, they were not allowed to come in and dominate the stories any more."

ty Knight that now that there were two protagonists, they were not allowed to come in and dominate the stories any more. I feel like that was the chief modification. When it was just *IRON FIST*, it tended to be Iron Fist and his two companions—or even *THE TWO COMPANIONS* guest-starring Iron Fist—but when you've got two heroes in the first place, and the heroes are super-heroes, I really could not see two private investigators—even people with bionic prosthesis and samurai swords—being able to fight in the same league as the heroes did. So I want to keep using Colleen and Misty, and I'd like to do more with them than I've been doing, but they had been dominating Iron Fist's book almost to the exclusion of Iron Fist. It was all right for them to take a piece of a book he had all to himself, but to take up two-thirds of his *half* I felt was extreme—he'd be getting a sixth of his own title. So the chief modification was with them. It's funny, I liked them very much before, but I found that they weren't working as characters for me—not only because they had a tendency to get into situations where I felt they didn't have the power to cope, but that they were also not real good-natured. They were always threatening to kill people, and crying—pardon me, not crying, that was my big innovation: "You'll Believe a Woman Can Cry"—and agonizing. Colleen gets kidnapped and brutalized, and mentally raped and stuff, and Iron Fist saves her—so what's she doing? Is she showing any gratitude? No! She's threatening him with her sword: "I could kill you for what you did to me!" *Not* somebody I would care to share an office with, for example. Not somebody I'd want my brother dating. And Iron Fist and Misty love each other, but every time he stands up to her and expresses an opinion she doesn't care for, she takes off to the Carribean for six months or goes to Hong Kong, or just tells him he's gauche (laughter). So I've always liked their cockiness and their abrasiveness, but they were not people I'd have felt particularly safe being friends with, and I lightened them up a little. I did it gradually, I didn't just suddenly one day pull the plug on them. I hope they're still recognizably Colleen and Misty, but I feel that mentally, they're a little healthier than they were, or at least I hope they are.

HOWELL: You said there's always a tendency for you in interviews...

DUFFY: When I'm interviewed, there is a tendency for me to come off sounding very critical of Chris. More critical than I mean to, but that's only because I am his heiress on the book, and everything I've changed, or done differently than he would have, I have to account for. The result is I have to say why I prefer my way to his way, and it comes out sounding critical.

HOWELL: Probably the same way with anybody taking over a strip, or a feature, or characters from anybody else.

DUFFY: I know, but I guess, just because he is the one person I've inherited from, and he was so possessive of it in the first place.

HOWELL: Do you think that there wasn't any such clear identification with the *LUKE CAGE* characters and setting?

DUFFY: Absolutely not. Chris had been with *IRON FIST* for three years, but Cage he'd only been with for a couple of months.

HOWELL: And thinking back, I don't have any clear impression of any one person staying with the *LUKE CAGE* book for a long period of time.

DUFFY: Oh, no. I'm the record holder on Cage. In fact, I think I may be the record holder several times over at this point. And it's not that long to go before I'm also the record holder on Iron Fist, but Chris had a very heavy-duty emotional investment in what he was doing with the book, and the result is that you will still continue to see Chris Claremont writing stories about Colleen and Misty. He will continue to want to use them, and want to stay with them, and want to guest-star Iron Fist in what he does, I think as long as he's with the company, because he was that close to it before he gave it up.

DUFFY: Daughters of The Dragon. Iron Fist was just a means to an end.
KALISH: Means for two more female characters.
DUFFY: Oh yeah.
HOWELL: Vampires are just a means to an end, too.
DUFFY: What?!
HOWELL: That was in *"The Daughters of the Dragon,"* the last one. [*BIZARRE ADVENTURES #26*]
DUFFY: Oh, that's right! Yes.
HOWELL: And Cage and Danny—have they changed at all?
DUFFY: I don't think so. Each of them had been written by five or six people before me. All I felt was there for me to do was figure out what was truest to their character in all the things each of them had done. There again, I tried to boil them each down to a recognizable entity, to the point at which I *know* what Cage will do in a given situation, and the readers know it too. Maybe it's not so easy with Iron Fist, because he's a little bit more understated anyway, he doesn't have the obvious reactions Cage does, but where you can say, "Yeah, this is the kind of thing he'd do in this situation, this is how he feels about things."
HOWELL: Are you trying for a particular style of plotting with the book? You mentioned before that you think The Living Monolith story, for instance, was a mistake. But since then, it's all been more down-to-Earth adventures, which strike me as being more recognizably—I'd say more like Cage style stories...
DUFFY: Ahhh! But you haven't seen some of the other things that are coming up.
HOWELL: I haven't (chuckle).
DUFFY: I have. But no, the thing is that what Cage had going for him was unique. I feel that one of the problems that you get into when you have one coherent universe, when you have a big company that does a lot of super-heroes, that they can get very homogenous. They start fighting the same kinds of villains, and exhibiting the same kinds of powers, and suddenly everybody can swing from building to building and rooftop to rooftop, and a bunch of people can fly. My personal feeling is "Find what is unique in your character—him alone—set those parameters, and then politely sort of tell other writers, 'paws off, this is my turf.'" And a lot of what Iron Fist was doing might just as easily have been done by Shang-Chi, or Modesty Blaise, or The Man From U.N.C.L.E., whereas Cage had this nice sort of gritty downtown feeling nobody else had. So I feel like it's sort of more interesting to do *'Son of Faerieland Meets Mr. New York'* with the book. Now, I'm going to do a reverse on that—it's in the works now—where I'm going to take Cage, and put him in Iron Fist's world.

But I feel like they both carry their worlds within them. Wherever you take Cage—you put Cage in the middle of the Saudi desert, give him a tribe of non-English speaking nomads to relate to, and Cage is going to essentially be dirty New York streets at heart. And I feel like Iron Fist doesn't have to be in K'un-Lun, because he is K'un-Lun, he carries it with him wherever he goes. We'll do some *"Iron Fist"* fantasy type stories, but I feel like the reality of Cage's world is something that the Marvel Universe has and has never exploited, whereas K'un-Lun is someplace in another dimension and we don't need that as much anyway. I think Iron Fist as the son of K'un-Lun who is *removed* from K'un-Lun is a lot more powerful than putting Cage in Fantasy Land. I'm not sure if I made my point there, but...
HOWELL: I think so.
KALISH: It's almost as if you see the Cage and the Rand figures as not exactly symbols of their various cultures, but as characters heavily influenced by their environment.

"...the thing is that what Cage had going for him was unique...My personal feeling is, 'Find what is unique in your character...' "

They reflect their environmental upbringing. Do you think that storytelling in general should have characters that are really well-defined, and should reflect something in and of themselves beyond what is necessary for the plot?
DUFFY: Absolutely. Mm-hm. Absolutely. I think that a good plot is important, but I feel like good characterization is part of what makes a good story. Motivation is almost entirely a matter of characterization, and except for sheer, physical, immediate necessity, most action comes from motivation. It helps me plotting a story a lot, to know my character. If somebody said "Do *CAPTAIN AMERICA,*" I would probably wrestle with it, and read books, and probably go see movies or something, for about two weeks before I would feel prepared to even try and cope. But with Power Man and Iron Fist—they could practically walk into a room, and tell me what they're going to do in a given situation. I've got that strong a handle on them. I know where they're from, and what they're all about, and it helps me a lot, knowing what they'd do, given a circumstance.
KALISH: Given the two characters, which is your favorite?
DUFFY: I really don't have one, I...
KALISH: Ah, there's the creative mother speaking (laughter).
DUFFY: No, no. Funny you should use the word "mother" because the thing is that, with the both of them, they're real ornery. Cage is real ornery, and I admire his orneriness,

and I like that about him. He. . . oh, God, he's so cranky, he's just wonderful. But Iron Fist. . . I feel very protective of Iron Fist, 'cause he's sort of an innocent, and he's very gauche, and I know that side by side with this gaucherie, he is the best martial artist who have ever lived. He's so good he doesn't even have anything to prove. So Iron Fist I admire, and yet, feel very protective of, and. . . aw, how can you not love Cage? He wins more fights on his personality than he does on his powers.

KALISH: Which one do you identify most with?

DUFFY: Um... probably Cage. (Laughter)

HOWELL: How about their side-kicks? Out of Misty and Colleen, which do you like the better, and which do you think you identify more with?

DUFFY: There again, it's not a question of liking either one better. I feel like I identify more with Colleen, simply because, well, let's make no bones about it, John [Byrne] and Chris [Claremont] were in love with Misty. They really were!

KALISH: They were?

DUFFY: They were! Oh, deeply! And they still are! Chris still keeps trying to script them into *THE X-MEN*. Misty was their Modesty Blaise character and their Lindsay Wagner character at the same time (laughter), and they didn't leave a lot of room for characterization on her. Her character is *established*, and all I tried to do was *gentle* her a bit, without taking away from her strength. Colleen was mentally ill. I really don't think she was entirely sane. Last seen threatening Iron Fist with a sword, because he'd saved her mind in a way she found painful, and then next seen, she's suddenly turned into Joanna Lumley—"Wow, is that Scott Summers? Gee, what a hunk! Too bad he's taken." It's like one minute she's Toshiro Mifune, and the next minute she's borderline nymphomaniac!

KALISH: Interesting characterization.

HOWELL: I can see why you might have realized a need to soften.

DUFFY: Well, not exactly soften, but sort of justify. With Colleen I felt there was this need to explain why this unbelievably grim and murderous samurai character suddenly just turns into this aching yearning little teeny-bopper with a crush on the first brooding Heathcliff figure she meets. So I had a lot of fun straightening Colleen out, and I think she's about as straight as I'm going to get her right now, but Misty's character was so well-established, that all I had to do was keep going with her, and do stories that had Misty in them. Colleen I felt like I had to figure out for myself: "Where is she coming from? How do I know which button is going to give me *'Swords of Samurai Death,'* and which button is going to give me *'Gidget Goes to Hawaii?'* " (Laughter) I think I've figured that out now; I think we can count on Colleen responding, if not in a rational way, then at least in a predictable way, to the things she gets into. But as a result I identify a little more with Colleen, because she took some thought.

HOWELL: I was pleasantly surprised to see her poor forgotten father turn up. (Laughter)

DUFFY: Oh, poor Professor Wing! I mean *really*, when I got on the series, I had been a loyal *IRON FIST* reader from time gone by. Professor Wing takes Danny Rand under his wing, y'know, Danny comes out of K'un-Lun and here's this nice old anthropologist, who takes him into his home, and is so nice, and is offering him tea and anecdotes and stuff. . . and they cook his brain, and just leave him?

KALISH: As a vegetable.

DUFFY: As a vegetable! Yes, well, kind of a cooked vegetable. (Laughter) I went back, and was re-reading the series, and like "Wait a minute! You blasted this guy's brain four goddam years ago!"

HOWELL: And nobody even remembered him.

DUFFY: Y'know, I think you're right, I think nobody did remember him, so. . .

HOWELL: Side-balloon of Colleen, saying, "Oh gee, I should really go see if I can help my father one of these years."

KALISH: "He's a steamed carrot." (Laughter)

DUFFY: Oh, I had some fun writing the Professor Wing—y'know, "I'm still not sane although I look it," scenes (laughter) for just that reason. But I started conspiring to give him back his mental health the minute I came on the book, but because it was bi-monthly at that time, it took me a while to get around to him, and there was poor Alan Cavenaugh, being chased hither and yon by the I.R.A. and never knowing who was going to get even with him, and we still haven't figured it out, and I have contributed to the problem without solving it—although I will—with the question of who has been ripping off Jeryn Hogarth's stately home every so often, going in there with helicopters and stealing things. . .

KALISH: I'd forgotten that!

DUFFY: It's the way I've given you an ending without giving you a resolution. It's very deceptive. And the problems everybody remembers: as of the end of *POWER MAN #75*, there should not be *one* question hanging about K'un-Lun.

HOWELL: That's a tall order.

DUFFY: It's a soluble issue. (Laughter)

KALISH: Had to fill up those pages somehow.

DUFFY: Right. Right, as a matter of fact, on that one, Kerry and I pulled the rug out from under a lot of what Chris and John were unquestionably leading up to. We did our *own* story there, instead of going where the history had obviously been meant to lead.

HOWELL: You're probably going to include this in there somewhere, but Danny supposedly has this dead sister someplace.

DUFFY: Oh, yeah, she's in there. Oh, you find out all you need to know about the perhaps-dead perhaps-sister, and the perhaps-dead perhaps-friend, and the perhaps-uncle, and the . . . oh, just everything you could name. It's all in there, somehow. I can't guarantee people will be happy with it, but I saw a way of doing what I hope is a good story, and answering all those questions at one shot, and I took it. The result is we'll be having another fill-in art job somewhere along the line, because the last thing we needed on a newly-monthly book was a double issue.

KALISH: How have the sales been? They obviously picked up somewhat.

DUFFY: Oh, they picked up enough to make us monthly. But sales are really relative, and I'm not sweating for the future of the book, or for me or Kerry or anything. We have occasional issues that set the world on fire, and occasional issues that damp it down. But it's healthy, and the fans seem to like it, which I like a lot.

KALISH: It always seems to sell very well in our area.

DUFFY: Oh, I'm delighted to hear it.

KALISH: It's actually developed quite an interesting following.

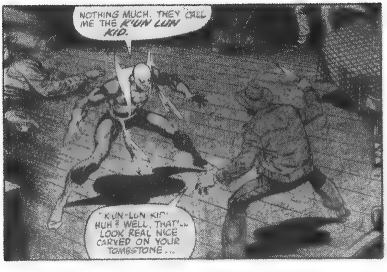
DUFFY: Well then, you live in an area where there are people of taste and discrimination.

KALISH: Of course. Nearby Wellesley.

DUFFY: Of *course*. Probably all my old professors, saying, "So this is what she was doing when she wasn't turning in her term papers."

HOWELL: I don't see many professorial sorts coming in and buying comics, if it's any consolation.

DUFFY: Oh, it's not. I'm heartbroken. (Laughter)



"I feel very protective of Iron Fist, 'cause he's sort of an innocent, and he's very gauche."

HOWELL: You could send them copies anonymously. We live in the Harvard area, and that's a very strong comic book environment—in several senses of the word.
DUFFY: Oh, I know. I had my time up there, same as everybody else.
KALISH: How is it different for you, who has both edited and written books, to work with another editor? I mean, you work with Archie [Goodwin] on *EPIC*, and you also work as a writer under another editor.
DUFFY: Well, it's the old problem of running with the hare and hunting with the hound. I feel like it gives me a pretty sound perspective, because I can really see things from both sides, because I'm Jo Freelancer, and I'm also Jo Editor. But on the other hand it can make me a real pain in the neck to work with, because I think I'm really tough on my editors. Denny and Ralph are probably real sick of the sight of me occasionally (laughter), because I'll go in there, I'll see a book that I've worked on sitting on their desk, I'll proofread it, I'll criticize such-and-such, and dictate "this letterer, and I want this coloring," and Frank Miller comes in and works on the covers, and I lean over his shoulder and whisper sexily in his ear, "I want to see that sketch before you start penciling." But when they want to utilize me, I can be a certain amount of practical good, because I can look at the book and say, "This is colored wrong—*this* is the right color, because it's been established that such-and-such. You can find your reference here," and my proofreading eye, I guess they can't quarrel with. But on the other hand, sometimes it must be like having just one spoon too many in the editorial dish, because even though I am just the writer—and should theoretically be minding my own business—I can't resist the temptation to nursemaid something I've worked on.
KALISH: Especially because you have all the ground rules down pat as well. How about working on the *EPIC* side of the house? Here, you're working with various freelancers on their projects. . .
DUFFY: Well, on *EPIC* it's a little different, because on *EPIC* it's not work-for-hire. Like on the four-color books, Marvel owns the work the people do. They are doing work *for* Marvel. On *EPIC*, we have the right to buy or not buy what people do for us, but it's *their work*. We're just buying the right to print it, and as a result, the editorial control can boil down to a yes or a no. If people want to come to me for editorial input, or they want to come to Archie, they're sure to get it, and Archie in particular is very good about sitting down with people and going over proposed storylines with them before the fact. But you don't get the same kind of license to kibitz that you would if you were actually buying the work instead of just printing it.
KALISH: You've worked both as an assistant editor for the work-for-hire material, and now also for *EPIC*. Which do you prefer doing? The one that gets you closer to the actual work, and deeper into it, or the. . .
DUFFY: No. As a matter of fact, I think maybe I don't have the makings of a good editor in the long run, simply because I am too much of a "I want to do it myself" creatively. I found editing very frustrating at one period when I was editing the books for Allen. I was just dying, because I didn't have the energy to write my own stuff, and all I was doing was driving Bill and Chris and—who else was writing for me then?—Dave Kraft, crazy, breathing down their necks. It didn't last long, I hope, and they were very good about it, but the fact is that I could see where I felt they were going wrong, and rather than guiding them, I was just wanting to do it myself. I knew that I shouldn't, and that it wasn't my place to do so, and that it was draining me creatively. With *EPIC*, I'm forced to be more objective, and to do less meddling. And as a result, what we get is purer—it's more from the creator—and all I'm really doing on *EPIC* is doing the proofreading, expediting things for them, seeing that pages are done to the correct dimensions, giving the creators technical advice in terms of how to get a better package for when it's printed. . .
KALISH: And trying to work out a commercial blend of types of stories. . .
DUFFY: Yes, but that leaves Jo Writer fresh for when she goes home in the evening, to sit down at her own typewriter, and get work done—or to curl up with a good novel and not feel her brain's all burned out.
KALISH: So what does Jo Writer or Jo Editor look for in the future?
HOWELL: This isn't the last question, don't be fooled.
DUFFY: More days. (Laughter) What I do look for in the future? More comics, better comics. More my own stuff. I wrote a novel back when I was in college, and the poor thing has just been lying on my desk going, "One last rewrite, and send me to the publisher," ever since—and I've just been too lazy or too timid to give it the last rewrite it needs. It was never my intention to become a full time

comics writer, just as I said it was never my intention to become an editor, but I tried it and liked it. Even when I intended to become a comics writer, I thought I would work on comics for a few years, and then set the world on fire with novels and screenplays. And instead I've got this poor 40,000 words of deathless prose just dying because it's not going anywhere, so I want to work on that. I want to write grown-up books, and I want to do screenplays, or teleplays—unless it turns out that screenwriting is utter guacamole-brain-making prostitution, I don't know. That's assuming that I can even get into it. I'm being wildly optimistic here. Also, I'd like to do series writing for *EPIC*, and more of my own stuff, I don't know. I want to keep writing.

KALISH: Any type of writing.

DUFFY: Yeah.

HOWELL: You want to do more writing. Would you be opposed to doing more comics series, or do you think that's too much of a consistent time drain?

DUFFY: No, I wouldn't be opposed to it, but I don't know if I'd have the time to do more series while I have the *EPIC* job. I've been threatened with...I've been producing comics at a tremendous rate...yeah, hey, I've been *threatened*. I mean, let's call a threat a threat here, about certain dire fates coming my way (and Kerry's way) if we don't keep *POWER MAN* well ahead of schedule, and on that basis, I seriously doubt I could do another monthly book, and there are just not a lot of bi-monthlies lying around. Also, I'm beginning to get to the age where I want to do my own thing and retain copyright on it. There are things that I've done that I've sold to Marvel, that I've taken my money for, and then afterwards said, "Well, golly gee whillickers, do I really want to see Fred Smoot writing this?" or "Do I really want So-and-so telling me that this is what this character would do and this is how we'll handle it, when it was my idea in the first place?" So I don't know how I'll feel about that in the future, so that'll make a difference. The thing is: say I had a chance to write *FANTASTIC FOUR*, one of my old favorites. What can I do—except maybe the 1980s definitive *FANTASTIC FOUR*—that hasn't already been done before, or won't be undone by some other writer later? It's like, there is a certain beauty in their legacy, and certainly a fan wish-dream in it, but on the other hand, knowing that it went on before you and will go on after you can be very daunting if you really flatter yourself that you have any kind of creative vision.

HOWELL: I can see that.

DUFFY: (Laughs) And the conversation dies.

HOWELL: I was thinking of what Bill Mantlo was telling us this morning. He told us some real horror stories about how he left a strip, and everything that he had done before was all just immediately undone...the new writer wanted the slate wiped clean, and he said that he had been guilty of it too, in *FRANKENSTEIN*. On his first page, he blew up all Doug Moench's villains, BOOM! Then on to something new.

DUFFY: Yeah, Bill's right. I saw it happen to him, I know the series he was talking about, and there is that tendency. As a matter of fact, I was very proud of myself when I took over *POWER MAN*, that I resisted the temptation to do that. I mean, I could have, the temptation was there, but all I had to do was pick the elements I wanted—that book had so many elements in it from so many sources. But time and again, whenever a writer changes on a strip, the strip gets a complete overhaul—whether it needs it or not. You know, when you can tell who the writer was by who the hero's girlfriend is, that kind of thing.

HOWELL: IRON MAN?

DUFFY: Um...I'm not going to say a word. I'm not going to say a word. But you can see it happening where there will be a different supporting cast, or a different set or a different slant, depending on who the writer is. As it turns out, I am not the editor of *DOCTOR STRANGE* right now. My one stipulation to Roger Stern, when I was the editor and he was going to be taking over the book, was "I do not want Sarah Wolfe written out." I'm not saying Sarah had that much going for her as a character—we have yet to see—but it would have been too ignominious for Chris [Claremont] to come on the book, introduce her, and then have her disappear as soon as Chris left. Now Roger on the other hand has just introduced his own extra supporting character anyway—everybody does that, it seems to me everybody contributes at least one character to the books they do—but at least Sarah is still there. So whatever he may do with her, there will not have been this abrupt obvious and ignominious dump when he came on the book. Readers will not go, "Oh! I can see exactly where writer A left the book and writer B took over, because here's where the supporting cast got the heave-ho."

HOWELL: Along the same lines, which character, or characters, have you added to *POWER/FIST?*

DUFFY: Jennie Royce, the secretary.

HOWELL: You're right.

DUFFY: She was my only real addition to the core of the book. And a lot of the street people who come in are my contribution.

HOWELL: You wouldn't count Bob Diamond, technically.

DUFFY: No, I...well, okay, he was fulfilling a need that the book had. I really felt Iron Fist needed a sparring partner, and it just seemed like such a natural. It was a little bit of fan in me, coming out in that I liked *"The Sons of the*

Tiger," and this was a way of keeping them alive. But also, believe it or not, when I introduced Bob Diamond into the book—over three years ago—I had my eye on a storyline, which I am just completing now. Bob Diamond is in the book for a very definite purpose. I'm going to keep him around now, because I've gotten to like him, and I've got other stories that involve him and The Sons sometime in the future (in which they'll be clients of Heroes For Hire, that kind of thing) but from his very first appearance in *POWER/FIST*, I was setting him up for a real big deal. And again, it's part of the book's current *magnum opus* in issue #74-75.

HOWELL: Is this developing attraction between him and Colleen just a fringe benefit?

DUFFY: Well, I'm glad somebody's figured out that it's an attraction!

HOWELL: What have people been saying?

DUFFY: There have been people who really thought that it was a hostility thing. There again, I think the fact that Colleen didn't used to be real sane in her personal relations may have contributed to it. But a lot of people look no farther than the fact that they bickered every time they were together, and saw real hostility there, instead of sexual tension.

HOWELL: The Beatrice and Benedick syndrome.

DUFFY: Oh yeah. That was what I intended it as, but (laughter) I sometimes wonder what other people out there read to get their ideas.

"...I have never really nursed any secret epics, and I have never really been kept from doing stories I've wanted to do."

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KALISH: THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER?

DUFFY: BOY TRAPPED IN REFRIGERATOR EATS OWN FOOT (laughter).

KALISH: No wonder they see hostility (laughter).

DUFFY: Yes. His relationship with Colleen, such it is at the moment, started out as gravy, but it wound up giving me some room to do things with the plotting that I'm taking to town right now.

KALISH: It's a good indication that Colleen has achieved a much healthier state of being, that she can actuallly start to be attracted to someone.

DUFFY: Well, she's got two more catharsisses (catharses?) to go (laughter)!

KALISH: She's not cured yet.

DUFFY: Almost. Almost. We're getting there. I'm doing the same sort of thing with Colleen now that I was doing with Misty's arm, back in the "Big Apple Bomber" thing, where I felt that Chris had taken Misty a certain way towards catharsis and health...

KALISH: But didn't quite bring her to the point where she could come to grips with not having her arm.

DUFFY: Yeah, and like I feel that Colleen is going through some steps that'll sort of make whole all these various parts, where they will all come together and coalesce.

I had a lot of trouble with Misty, because until just recently, like I said, when I started getting into the Dick Francis steeplechasing thrillers, the whole idea of a character with an artificial arm (especially bionic) just offended me so much. And it's probably real good for Misty that I hadn't read Dick Francis before I got to her, or she might have wound up with some even strange influences than Modesty Blaise in her character. But it took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that I couldn't make Misty's arm go away, and she couldn't grow a new one, and that I wold have to come to terms with it, the same as she did, and just get used to the idea that I had a 1975 trendy television gimmick stuck in my book forever. Well, "my book, forever" ha ha. Stuck in the book I am currently writing for as long as the book might run.

HOWELL: How much Modesty Blaise do you think there is in Misty?

DUFFY: I'm not familiar enough with Modesty—I'm going to be. I just bought six Modesty Blaise books, and I'm going to sit down and...

KALISH: Oh. You'll probably enjoy them.

DUFFY: Oh, I'm sure I will. My exposure to the character so far (in newspaper strips) I've liked very much. So I don't know exactly how much of Modesty is in Misty yet, although I'll find out. But knowing Chris, and knowing John, I know how much of Modesty underlies Misty, and is meant to be in her. Regardless of how much comes out on the surface, I know that she was one of the major influences they drew off for any female protagonist.

I have never been a real big believer in doing that kind of homage, just because I feel like—for me at least—there are better ways of doing it. I could never copy the letter of something. What'll happen is that *POWER MAN AND IRON FIST* will have influences in it. In one of the letter columns, my friend Bob said—and I let him get away with saying it, because it was true—that I was drawing on Asterix and Obelix as models for Cage and Iron Fist. And I was, but I was actually drawing on dozens of other teams, too. I love teams, and every team I see, I say, "Is there any little bit of interplay here that would work for Power Man and Iron Fist?" With me, it's more a question of mood and spirit and characterization. I'll read something in a book, and say "Yeah! That clarifies that little point I was looking for," but usually my obsessions have time to age tremen-

dously and get completely diluted before they get anywhere. There are some Brian Froud influences in upcoming *POWER MAN/IRON FIST*s that I practically guarantee nobody will detect. And I've pulled some almost-impossible-to-recognize elements out of *DOCTOR WHO*, and put them in there. (I'll even parody the Doctor, sometime soon). And I know Dick Francis is going to be a major influence with the future, but obviously I'm not—I hope I never take Power Man and Iron Fist to the racetrack (Laughter). Well, I mean, the temptation is there. Everybody Francis writes is either a jockey or a racetrack investigator or something. I'm not going to take that element of it, but I might look at the way he sets up a character, and how he makes them tick, or how he builds suspense, and that will be turning up in the comics.

HOWELL: You're drawing a practical line between "homage," and drawing on another writer's successful techniques, then?

DUFFY: Well, I hope so. I'm not meaning to imply anything critical about other writers or the way they go about things here. I only know what works for me, and what I feel works for my book. Well, it's not just limited to me, either, now that I think of it. I hope I'm not tipping his hand right now, but Frank Miller tends to do the same thing I do in his writing, where something that he is terribly into will turn up in *DAREDEVIL* or in something he writes, but not straightly lifted. Like he really loves Toshiro Mifune, and samurai movies, and a certain Japanese comic, *GEN OF HIROSHIMA*, and you won't be seeing any of those story-lines turning up in Frank's work, but you may see a character type or two you could recognize from another source, or storytelling techniques that he may have picked up from the work on *GEN*, and I know that he really likes the *HILL STREET BLUES* TV series. I've been shoving Dick Francis and the Sid Halley character at him, and he's been shoving *HILL STREET BLUES* at me. I know that some of the pacing, and the types of characterization, and the synthesis of light mood with dark tragedy, are things he's going to draw upon for things that he does in the future. It's more a matter of approach than imitation.

KALISH: Less homages than just inspiration.

Are there any comics stories—stories that would actually use the comics medium—that you would like to write, but you can't, because either the industry hasn't quite developed to that degree, or because you don't think the audience is prepared to accept it?

DUFFY: Any stories that I have that I feel that strongly about, I will either find a way of doing here, or do myself in prose, and damn the audience. I guess it makes me rare, because ever since I got into this business, I've been meeting people my own age who came into it, who've been nursing their definitive—fill the name of character—story, and just waiting for the day that they could get to do it, and I have never really nursed any secret epics, and I have never really been kept from doing stories I've wanted to do. Sometimes it's a matter of finding the right character, or the right place, but I didn't come in here with any great fan wish-dreams of stories I would do if I got to be a pro, and since I got to be a pro, why should I be wasting my energy on might-have-beens, when I've got to worry about due-tomorrows?

KALISH: And what are the elements that you always try and put into a "good story?"

DUFFY: A good story obviously needs tension, conflict and resolution. Also, no matter how grim the story gets, if I can't actually get in humor, I'll try and get in irony. And best of all, I'd like to get in some whimsy, and always some kind of a chance for somebody in there to show some compassion, or some affection. I like conflict, I like humor, I like positive human emotions, to make the reader feel like something intense and important has happened, even if it's a stupid little frivolous story. I mean, there can be an intense and important moment in two people having coffee, and there can be intensity and importance in Galactus eating New Jersey. •

Next Issue:
COMICS FEATURE interviews
BILL MANTLO
On writing Marvel Comics, "toy" series, and "prestige" series.

An overview of **The Micronauts** *by Kurt Busiek*

The Lost Comics Companies *by Chuck Wooley*

Paul Dini reviews **The Heavy Metal Movie**

Margaret O'Connell's "Women and Power in Comics" concludes, contrasting **Phoenix and the Prime-Time Vixens**

Murray R. Ward's "Super-Team Spirit" on **The DC Second-Banana Groups of the 1960s: including the Metal Men and the Doom Patrol**

Bryan Uhlenbrock on **World's Finest Comics**

Peter Sanderson's "End Notes" on **Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend**

Kurt Olsson reviews John Byrne's **Fantastic Four**

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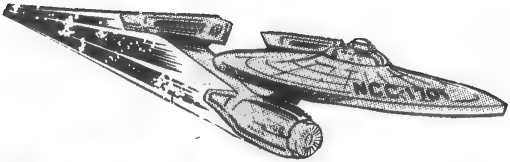

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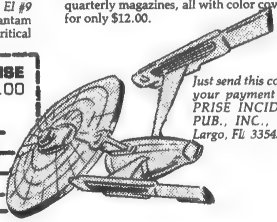

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Super-Heroine as Chaos-Bringer

Part Two

JEAN GREY

in the

Storeroom of Sad Thought Balloons

by Margaret O'Connell

When I interviewed Chris Claremont about the X-Men in Summer, 1978, he claimed that the ominous side effects of becoming Phoenix that Jean Grey had already begun to display at that point had been written in to provide a rationale for the cutback in her powers which had been forcibly imposed on the *X-MEN* creative team by their editors. In Claremont's own words:

> ...Dave [Cockrum, the *X-MEN* artist at the time Jean Grey first became Phoenix] and I kind of liked the idea that we had a female character who was cosmic. No one else did. Len [Wein] objected strenuously to our using Firelord if Phoenix beat him. We couldn't have a lady character who's cosmic, because—well, his argument was that it made the rest of the X-Men superfluous.

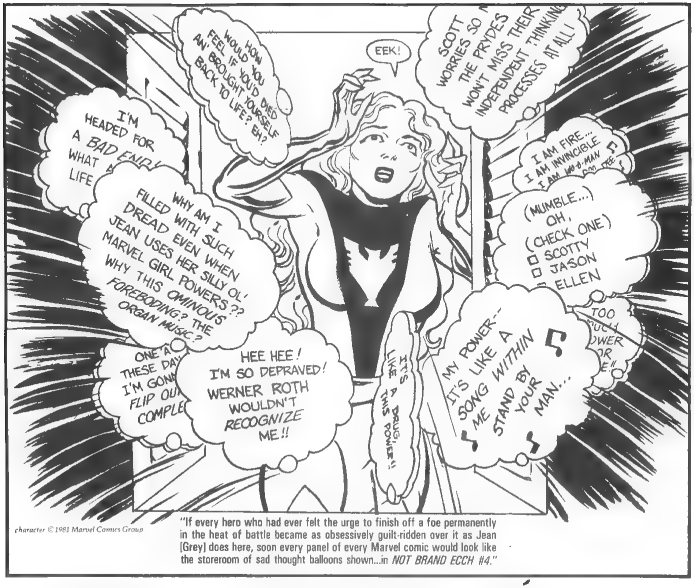
O'CONNELL: You could say the same thing about the Avengers and Thor.

CLAREMONT: Yes, we did. Quite often.

We got around it by having the fight be a draw. And by making sure that Phoenix got that last shot, which is blasting Firelord ten or twelve miles into New Jersey [*X-MEN #105*, June 1977].

So anyway, we were told, Dave and I, that Phoenix could not be cosmic. And when the editor passes down an edict, you're stuck with it. What we did then was sit down, and—we had to cut her back. So we decided to cut her back to roughly where Storm is, which is fine. Now I had to think of a rationale. Okay. I put my head together, and we figured that Jean—this is my own personal interpretation. You will hear disagreements among other members of the editorial staff if they hear it. You'll hear disagreements from [John] Byrne if he hears it, 'cause they think—well, they think it's a mistake.

The potential to become Phoenix is still within Jean. But without the necessary increase in her awareness, in her perception. If her consciousness is not cosmic, then she can't handle the power. It's like Doc Strange could not become the Sorceror Supreme until he had achieved a certain psychic and emotional balance, or awareness. Neither can Jean. She'll burn herself out, she'll be warped, twisted, turned into an evil person. Ergo, what happened was her mind shut her down, as a safety mechanism. To prevent



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"If every hero who had ever felt the urge to finish off a foe permanently in the heat of battle became as obsessively guilt-ridden over it as Jean [Grey] does here, soon every panel of every Marvel comic would look like the storeroom of sad thought balloons shown...in *NOT BRAND ECCH #4*."

her from hurting herself, it just dropped a wall down.

Of course, one of the character elements Byrne and I are working on is, she really enjoyed being cosmic. She wants to be cosmic again. It's like a drug, a very strong, very irresistible drug, and she wants more. And the more she gets, the more she wants. But the thing is, she can't handle it. She's too young, in evolutionary terms, as well as in physical terms.

So there's a case of a perfectly logical rationale coming in ass-backwards. We're given the situation, we invent a rationale, rather than inventing the rationale and then applying it. Which is how things happen around here.
(originally printed in *THE COMICS JOURNAL #50*, p. 62)

What all these disclaimers and indignant cries of "The editor made me do it!" tend to obscure is that, far from belatedly introducing the idea that Jean's powers affect her like a mind-altering drug as an afterthought to justify the imposition of the psychic circuit-breakers he dreamed up to provide the power cutback required by his editors, Claremont had been implying that there was a negative side to Jean's impressive new powers from the very moment she got them. In the very next panel after the famous scene where she had "died" in the solar shuttle crash, proclaiming her new identity as Phoenix, the "reborn" super-heroine abruptly convulses with pain, crying out, "I—I... My mind—burning—so many memories... sensations—pain! Inside... tearing me apart! What's... happening to me? What have I done?!" (p. 10). She then collapses into unconsciousness and plummets back into the water, where she has to be saved by Cyclops from drowning.

While she is still in the hospital recuperating from the shuttle crash, Jean is visited by her then-roommate, Misty Knight, who confronts her with the fact that, "Something's been eatin' you up inside ever since that space flight. What is it, Jean? I'd like to help." Jean, looking haunted and losing the pupils of her eyes, among other special effects, replies, "So tell me, Misty Knight... how would you feel if you'd... died, then brought yourself back to life?" (*X-MEN #102*, p.16).

The darkly melodramatic overtones of fear and foreboding in both these speeches might be written off as a somewhat heavy-handed attempt to convey the reactions which would naturally be experienced by someone who had just been burned to cinders by the heat of re-entering earth's atmosphere, only to un-

expectedly discover that she possessed the ability to reconstruct her incinerated body from its ashes, complete with new powers and a new costume. It would hardly be surprising for such a person to be extremely disconcerted and even frightened by what she had just learned she was capable of doing (although both the "rebirth" scene itself and Jean's rather distraught reaction to it would have been more credible and effective if Claremont and Cockrum had taken greater pains to show on-panel that Jean actually did die, instead of just plunging underwater in the burning shuttle and taking longer to emerge from the wreckage than the other X-Men).

However, a few issues later, in *X-MEN #105* (June 1977), Claremont makes it quite clear that there is a more sinister reason for all this ominous organ music in the background. When Firelord crashes through the wall of Jean's apartment, demanding she hand over Professor X and the fugitive Princess Lilandra, the enraged young mutant responds by using her new powers in battle for the first time. "Her attack is savage, surprising both of them with its primal fury—" (p. 17). As mentioned in the Claremont interview, Phoenix knocks Firelord into New Jersey before being interrupted by Professor X's frantic telepathic plea that she rush back to the apartment to prevent an Imperial agent posing as Erik the Red from kidnapping Princess Lilandra. Halted by the Professor's summons as she is about to go after Firelord and finish him off, Jean obediently turns around and goes back, thinking, "And yet, part of me still wants to get Firelord—to... kill him! My power—it's hitting me like a drug. I've never felt such... ecstacy! God in heaven, what have I become?" (p. 26).

This bit of ominous foreshadowing acquires particular significance in the light of Claremont's behind-the-scenes statements quoted above. Since in the interview Claremont first refers to a definite editorial "edict" forbidding Phoenix to be cosmic (as opposed to "objections" and "arguments" against it) immediately *after* giving his version of what went on at the Marvel offices to produce this very Phoenix-fights-Firelord story, one might logically infer that he did not actually receive direct orders to cut back her powers until after (and perhaps as a direct result of) the completion of this story. Therefore, if Claremont were as enthusiastic about the character's cosmicness, and as resistant to suggestions that this should be toned down, as he claims (a claim which is borne out by the rather subversive way he "yielded" to

Melodramatic special effects: "...would have been more credible and effective if Claremont and Cockrum [had shown on panel] that Jean actually did die...."

Len Wein's opposition to his using Firelord if Phoenix beat him), one would hardly expect Claremont to voluntarily insert into a story written at this point elements suggesting that Jean's acquisition of the formidable Phoenix power was not an entirely good thing.

Yet Claremont included the above-quoted explicit reference to the perverse thrill Jean gets out of zapping her opponents in a story apparently written *before* the imposition of the actual editorial edict requiring the diminution of Phoenix's powers—an edict which he implies in the interview *preceded* both the invention of Jean's subconsciously self-imposed psychic circuit-breakers, and his concoction of the too-much-power-will-warp-her-mind rationale for those circuit breakers and the psychological necessity for them. ("So anyway, we were told... that Phoenix could not be cosmic. And when the editor passes down an edict, you're stuck with it. What we did *then* was sit down, and... cut her back... *Now* I had to think of a rationale... So there's a case of a perfectly logical rationale coming in ass-backwards. We're given the situation, we invent a rationale, rather than inventing the rationale and then applying it. Which is how things happen around here." [italics mine]) In fact, going by Claremont's statements in the interview alone, with their repeated pointed references to the key role played by the editorial order to find a way to reduce Phoenix's powers, you would think that if it hadn't been for this order, the idea that cosmic demi-godhood might have a disastrous effect upon Jean's character would never have even occurred to the fervently feminist scripter. The inexorably logical progression of negative associations attached to the Phoenix power by Claremont's text from the moment Jean first acquired it suggests the reverse: that Claremont at some level envisioned Phoenix as an obscurely terrifying figure even when he first created her, long before his superiors knew enough about her to begin demanding troublesome changes.

However, this does not get Claremont's editors and other artistic associates off the hook. In the same interview passage quoted at the beginning of this article, Claremont alludes to the fact that, for whatever reasons, both (then) *X-MEN* penciller John Byrne and "other members of the editorial staff" specifically objected to his use of the Phoenix-as-power-junkie-whose-subconscious-mind-must-protect-her-from-herself explanation of Jean's demotion to a less cosmic power level. Unfortunately, in direct contrast to the forceful editorial reaction to Claremont's intention of featuring a heroine who was "too powerful," the powers-that-be apparently failed to object strongly enough to this aspect of the storyline to significantly impede the

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headstrong scripter's projected portrayal of Jean's increasing corruption and ultimate conversion into the casually genocidal Dark Phoenix.

Indeed, after these initial protests from his co-workers—which he obviously ignored—Claremont appears not to have encountered any further editorial resistance to the unfolding of Jean's chaos-bringer's progress until the prolonged *"Dark Phoenix Saga"* was almost concluded, when appalled Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter issued his notorious eleventh-hour decree that Phoenix must die for her crimes. Even then, Shooter seems to have objected merely to Claremont's failure to punish the formerly ethically irreproachable mutant *sufficiently* for her atrocities, and not to the fan-favorite scripter's questionable judgment in getting the third-oldest Marvel super-heroine into such a morally compromising position in the first place.

Thus, despite his disclaimers, Claremont himself seems to be essentially responsible for the uncontrollable destructiveness and powerlust of his creation Phoenix, whose success spectacularly thrust back into the spotlight the old comic-book association between destructiveness and female power. However, the editor's rapid acceptance of Claremont's insistent focus on the inadequately-motivated moral inversion of Phoenix, and eventually of other heroines who appeared in the *NEW X-MEN* also, and the subsequent attempts of various persons at Marvel to actively cash in on the readers' evident fascination with this theme by applying it to other characters in other books as well (e.g., the incessantly savage She-Hulk and the revamped Hellcat, who lives up to her name quite literally), suggest that far from foisting a purely private obsession onto a bemused public by some fluke of circumstance, Claremont was simply a bit quicker to fall in step with the spirit of the times than anyone else. Dark Phoenix, then, was simply the first symptom of the chaos-bringer craze, and not its cause.

The true cause of the recent sudden clustering of portrayals of very powerful, very aggressive so-called super-heroines who are also very destructive and very threatening to society and even to life itself, is identical with the cause of the recent upsurge in anxiety over the alleged increase in real-life violent crimes by women. Discussing this supposed increase in female criminal activity in the introduction to her book *WOMEN WHO KILL*, Ann Jones points out that the so-called female crime wave first received widespread attention in 1975, when a criminologist named Freda Adler "noticed that a renewed women's movement paralleled apparently phenomenal increases in crimes by women, [and] mistakenly concluded that one trend caused the other." Jones, who cites statistics to prove that "in absolute terms, crimes by women are increasing [only] roughly on a par with crimes by men," despite the greater media attention they have recently received and the overzealous eagerness to crack down on every conceivable female offender this publicity has helped to generate among law enforcement officials, concludes:

> "Adler was quite right that the two phenomena—the women's movement and female criminality—go together, but not as she supposed in terms of cause and effect. It is simply that the presence of one prompts fear of the other. Agitation for women's rights always sparks enormous anxiety, among women and men alike, about the proper place of women in society, and because 'take' in one element of society seems to mean 'give' in another, about the safety of the whole social order. That anxiety manifests itself in many ways: in the fear that women are 'unsexing themselves,' which in turn produces campaigns to outlaw bloomers, [and] to elevate a regressive 'femininity' to 'total womanhood'...; in the fear that that the family is disintegrating, which results in virulent attacks upon... divorce, homosexuality, women in the work force, [and] federally funded day care...; and in the fear that wo-

men, released from some traditional restraints, will turn to unbridled evil, mayhem, and murder." (pp. 2-4)

One of the chief comic-book manifestations of the last 15 years' "agitation for women's rights" has been the recent change in the portrayal of super-heroines, which has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the actual *number* of heroines, especially very powerful super-heroines. A comic-book super-heroine's super-abilities, if exercised to the same extent as males heroes' powers routinely are, make her the physical equal, if not superior, of almost any man—certainly any non-super-powered man. Because of this, such a heroine is potentially capable not only of escaping "from some traditional restraints," but of reversing the conventional feminine role of subservience by exercising literal power over others, against their will, if necessary (e.g., by capturing criminals who, naturally, would prefer to escape). Thus, any woman with super-powers is a potential emblem of liberation of women from their traditional passive, confined role—a phenomenon William Moulton Marston capitalized on quite consciously when he created Wonder Woman, the first major super-heroine, as the slogan-spouting Amazon embodiment of his own particular brand of feminism. (Other early comics creators were also aware of the subversive potential inherent in the concept of a female with super-powers, though they did not embrace this potential as Marston did, but sought to camouflage it by giving the heroines they created insignificant powers that were virtually useless in a fight, such as the ability to shrink or turn invisible, and by portraying them as too timid or empty-headed to pose an effective threat to anyone.)

As a female whose peculiar physical abilities automatically give her the potential to transcend the usual female limitations, the super-powered woman is also inevitably symbolic of the threat to the established social order posed by the liberation of the "weaker sex" from their time-honored subordinate position. The more powerful she is in purely physical terms, the more of a threat she is symbolically—which perhaps explains why Claremont's editors were so irrevocably determined that Marvel "couldn't have a lady character who's cosmic." The threat is further intensified when, instead of demonstrating a merely dutiful or downright reluctant attitude toward her "unfeminine" avocation of crimefighting, and/or displaying mitigating feminine weaknesses (as heroines such as Supergirl, the Wasp, the early Scarlet Witch, and the notorious Invisible Girl did in the early 1960s), the super-powered woman is eager to exercise her powers in battle, and even aggressively trigger-happy in search of action, as so many of the newer heroines, especially the most physically formidable of them, tend to be. Clearly, heroines of this type provide a more striking than usual focus for people's fears "that [liberated] women... will turn to unbridled evil, mayhem, and murder." Particularly when they possess powers with the literally earth-shattering destructive potential of Phoenix and the She-Hulk, whose awesome abilities give them the power of life and death over most opponents—not to mention innocent bystanders like the unfortunate asparagus people whose planet abruptly became incapable of supporting life when Dark Phoenix snacked on its sun.

The kind of sadistic joy in battle and eagerness for the kill that Phoenix senses in herself and is frightened by during her fight with Firelord—and on many subsequent occasions—is clearly undesirable (though no one, including Claremont, seemed too disturbed when a male character like Wolverine displayed similar emotions, usually without even feeling guilty or ashamed of them). However, Claremont's dialogue and captions so insistently link Jean's Phoenix power with images of intense dread, guilt, and anxiety—long before there is any real question of its intoxicating effect tempting her to do anything remotely reprehensible—that it soon becomes clear that it is not Jean's *potential* abuse of her power, but the *power itself*, and the exhilaration which she derives from exercising it even in morally unexceptionable ways, which we are to regard as somehow frightful and terrifying.

Many comic book heroes obviously enjoy having super-powers, at least in their more light-hearted moments, though this fact is seldom explicitly acknowledged unless the hero is an enthusiastic teenage novice like Christopher King of the current *"Dial 'H' for Hero"* strip in *ADVENTURE*, or a bubbly, na-

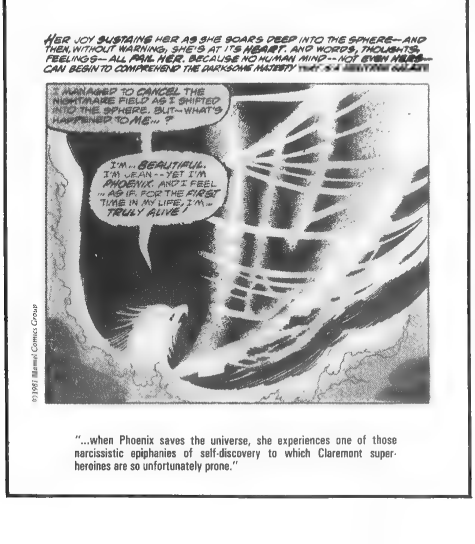
Phoenix in action: "...heroines of this type provide a more striking than usual focus for people's fears..."

ive ingenue like Steve Englehart's original interpretation of Patsy Walker-turned-Hellcat in *AVENGERS #141-151*. However, Jean Grey's enjoyment of her powers is portrayed as if it were something perverse and sinisterly unique to her, coming across as a narcissistic power trip at best. Most often, Jean's power and her pleasure in it are presented as evoking guilt and fear in her and the other characters even when that pleasure is not accompanied by bloodthirsty and sadistic impulses, as it usually is not in the early stages of her career as Phoenix.

On the few occasions when Claremont does not include any heavy-handed references to Jean's mingled joy in and fear of her own power, or to other characters' usually as yet unjustified concern that she will be able to control it, he undercuts even her most unequivocally constructive actions by giving her smugly self-glorifying dialogue which in hindsight sounds alarmingly reminiscent of the "I am Phoenix. I am God"—type statements she makes later, after being transformed into the "dreaded chaos-bringer of interstellar legend."

The unfavorable connotations of these rather arrogant-sounding flights of rhetoric may be at least partly unintentional. Claremont himself may well think such conspicuous self-satisfaction is perfectly justified in a right-thinking super-person who has just succeeded in accomplishing something. However, some of the utterances Phoenix gives vent to even in her finest hours tend to impress the reader as having a distinctly boastful ring inappropriate to the kind of morally superior being super-heroes are supposed to be, or at least strive to be.

Jean's trumpeting exclamation of triumph upon bursting forth from the waves after re-creating herself from nothing is a particularly embarrassing example of this sort of self-enteredly purple prose: "Hear me, X-Men! No longer am I the woman you knew! I am fire! And life incarnate! Now and forever—I am Phoenix!" (*X-MEN #101*, p. 7). Significantly, this grandiloquent proclamation foreshadows Jean's eventual metamorphosis from Phoenix into Dark Phoenix, which is signalled by her repetition of these identical words before exploding out of the X-Men's aircraft and trying to kill them at the conclusion of issue #134 (June 1980).



"...when Phoenix saves the universe, she experiences one of those narcissistic epiphanies of self-discovery to which Claremont super-heroines are so unfortunately prone."

Similarly, in *X-MEN #108* (Dec. 1977), when Phoenix saves the universe by reconstructing the lattice restraining a black hole-like neutron galaxy (which would suck everything that exists into itself if left unfettered), she experiences one of those narcissistic epiphanies of self-discovery to which Claremont super-heroines are so unfortunately prone (see also *MS. MARVEL #13*, Jan. 1978). Entering the M'Krann crystal containing the unraveling protective lattice, Jean exclaims, "What's happened to me...? ... I'm... beautiful. I'm Jean—yet I'm Phoenix. And I feel... as if, for the first time in my life, I'm... truly alive?" (p. 22). Such remarks might be understandable coming from someone who had just experienced some blinding revelation about herself through psychoanalysis or some new branch of the human potential movement, but they seem rather out of place on the lips of a super-heroine whose immediate business is not contemplating her own navel, but preventing the imminent destruction of the universe and everyone in it.

A more subtle instance of Phoenix's non-violent, positive use of her power being tainted by sentiments which would conventionally be considered excessively egotistical is the attitude she expresses upon powering up to an interstellar transporter to enable the X-Men to travel to Lilandra's planet and prevent the neutron galaxy from being unleashed. As her team-mates dive through the artificially-created space warp, Jean turns to Professor X and remarks, "I'd better go along! Someone's got to keep them out of trouble, Professor." (*X-MEN #105*, pp. 30-31). Under the circumstances, this casual reference to the fearsome new power Jean had expressed such anxiety over during the fight with Firelord earlier in the very same issue betrays an astonishingly arrogant nonchalance.

Far more common than these more positive presentations of Phoenix's power—flawed by highfalutin' narcissistic dialogue as they are—are recurring apprehensive thought balloons from Jean like the following: "I—I'm scared! I never wanted Phoenix's power—and yet, using it feels so... good—I'm not sure I can handle it. What's that saying...? 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' I'm lost inside. And no one can help me find my way." (*X-MEN #110*, April 1978, p. 10). At this point, the only evidence Jean has of the potentially corrupting effect of the Phoenix power is her easily-suppressed momentary impulse to kill Firelord in #105.

"Jean's own anxious broodings about how great power may lead to great atrocities are soon joined by a chorus of remarks from other characters..."

If every hero who had ever felt the urge to finish off a foe permanently in the heat of battle became as obsessively guilt-ridden over it as Jean does here, soon every panel of every Marvel comic would look like the storeroom of sad thought balloons shown in the Ecchs-Men story in *NOT BRAND ECCH #4*.

Jean's own anxious broodings about how great power may lead to great atrocities are soon joined by a chorus of remarks from other characters comparing her to the bloodthirsty Wolverine. In #111 (June 1978), Wolverine himself decides that provoking Jean to a state of gut-level, instinctive rage is the key to breaking Mesmero's hypnotic hold on her, just as it was for himself, since, "Down inside, we're a lot alike—even if she doesn't know it yet" (p. 23). In #113 (Sept. 1978), Magneto elaborates on this: "Phoenix caught me off-balance. She's nothing like she used to be... much wilder, almost barbaric. She enjoys using her power—as much as Wolverine loves using his claws" (p. 17). In #128 (Dec. 1979), Wolverine himself again approvingly asserts Jean's similarity to him while watching her attack Proteus: "Way to go, Jeannie! In a roughhouse, babe, yer my kind'a gal" (p. 19).

Despite the much-vaunted ferocity in battle Claremont repeatedly refers to in captions, at this point Phoenix, far from actually killing anyone (as Wolverine apparently did in *X-MEN #116*), or having to be continually prevented from doing so by others, appears not to have had another overtly murderous impulse since her encounter with Firelord. Still, when Moira McTaggert anxiously points out to Jean that, "Your psi powers have made a quantum leap," Jean replies, "And you're worried about whether I can handle it. Well, I'm worried, too. Sometimes, I almost wish I'd stayed dead on that shuttle" (*X-MEN #125*, Sept. 1979, p. 3).

After Jean begins to be subverted by Mastermind's psychic seduction (which begins in *X-MEN #125*, Sept. 1979), as well as the insidious effects of her own powers, the atmosphere becomes charged with sinister significance every time she uses her psionic super-abilities, no matter how slight and/or unexceptionably motivated her actions may be. Merely using her telepathic powers (which she had even as Marvel Girl) to mind-scan the crowd at a rather sordid disco (in accordance with Cyclops' instructions) causes Jean to emit ambivalent though balloons: "I can't screen out everyone's thoughts. Some of the images I'm receiving are so... vile. But, I can handle that. Part of me almost finds those thoughts... attractive" (*X-MEN #130*, Feb. 1980, p.5).

Later, when Phoenix flawlessly carries out Cyclops' commands in regard to a Hellfire Club-owned car which she had previously exceeded orders by smashing instead of just stopping, Scott thinks, "I can't get over how easily Jean reassembled that car with her TK powers... and then manipulated that unconscious driver like he was no more than her puppet. Every word, every move, came from her. And she pulled it off without a hitch, without strain. I should be proud of her—instead, I'm... frightened" (*X-MEN #131*, Mar. 1980, p. 16).

At this point, even Phoenix's telekinetically transforming Scott's street clothes into his costume when a sudden emergency arises takes on ominous overtones in his mind. This minor display of molecular rearrangement hardly seems to warrant a melodramatic thought-balloon reaction like, "I'm beginning to wonder if there's any limit to Phoenix's power. And if there isn't, how much longer can Jean keep it under control?!" (*X-MEN #130*, pp. 22-23). Turning one outfit into another telekinetically scarcely requires dangerously near-limitless power—even Storm could do it (see the aftermath of the shuttle crash in *X-MEN #101*, p. 10), long before Claremont decided to put her, too, through the Dark Phoenix/Rogue Storm process. As for Phoenix's motivation, for once it is entirely innocent, and even laudable. After all, this is a genuine emergency, not just an excuse to show off her snazzy new powers, as on the other two occasions when Jean makes her companions uneasy by demonstrating some of the more trivial applications of Phoenix's psionic abilities (in *X-MEN #125*, pp. 15, 22, and *#132*, p. 7).

No matter what Claremont may have said in public, or even consciously intended, these persistent and usually ludicrously unjustified dark foreshadowings hint to the reader from the moment Jean Grey is reborn as Phoenix that this rebirth will prove to be an even greater catastrophe for all concerned than Jean's death would have been. When Jean's much-hinted-at seduction by what amounts to the dark side of the Force (belatedly altered in #137 to possession by a demonically voracious energy entity which uses her as a focus) is finally overtly manifested by her murderous rampage in *X-MEN #134-136*, the underlying shape of this long-dragged-out storyline finally becomes clear. The *"Dark Phoenix Saga"* is a cautionary tale about the inescapably corrupting effect of great power on even an exceptionally good human being. And since the infinitely powerful and infinitely corruptible protagonist of that tale happens to be a woman, it also inevitably functions as a cautionary tale about the inability of women specifically to handle great power without cracking under the strain and nearly taking the whole universe down with them.

That it was perceived as such by at least some of the less sophisticated readers, no matter how non-sexist the creat-

ive team's intentions may have been, is demonstrated by the LoC printed in *X-MEN #139*. After angrily alluding to her ten-year-old sister's heartbroken reaction to the fate of Phoenix, who had been her favorite X-Man, the writer of this letter furiously concludes, "I bet if Phoenix had been a man, you guys would have wrote in the story that he was emotionally strong enough to control his power. However, since Jean was a woman, you guys killed her off! Dr. Don Blake didn't become mad with power when he became Thor, so I don't see why Jean couldn't handle her power boost! Jean (as Phoenix) saved the Universe, she deserved better than what she got! I'll never forgive you for what you did to Jean!"

The upright, well-intentioned person who becomes a literal monster upon attaining power is a recurring theme in Claremont's more recent work, reflecting his dark and pessimistic view of the potential susceptibility to evil of human nature as a whole, whether male or female. However, Claremont's portrayals of men who start out being good, but deteriorate catastrophically once they have the ability to do anything they please, tend to be restricted to occasional guest villains who are really victims of an unkind fate, like Sauron (*X-MEN #115-116*) and the Wendigo (*#139-140*). Such characters comprise a very minor strand in the incredibly tangled web Claremont has been weaving since he began scripting *X-MEN*, and their initial, quickly-corrupted goodness is easily overlooked by the casual reader, since the evidence of it is generally confined to brief flashbacks recounting their rather muddled origins.

When it comes to women, on the other hand, Claremont repeatedly takes already-existing female characters who have been firmly established as being actively altruistic, heroic, and good, steps up or showcases their powers, and then shows them succumbing to horrifyingly destructive and potentially homicidal fits of madness as a result. Whether the woman in question is pulled back from the brink of the abyss in the nick of time, like Snowbird in *X-MEN #140* and (Rogue) Storm in *X-MEN #147*, or irrevocably crosses the fatal line between theoretical bloodlust and actual genocide, like Jean Grey, makes little difference in the end. Claremont's increasingly obsessive repetition of this spectacular rise-and-fall scenario, almost always with a woman as the protagonist, sets up an ever-strengthening subliminal association between powerful women and weakness in the face of appalling temptation that effectively subverts his ostensibly feminist purposes.

More disturbing still, Claremont's editorial superiors seem all too inclined to condone his preoccupation with such consumingly destructive themes, and even to regard it as an additional selling point for the book. After the apparent commercial success of the original *"Dark Phoenix Saga,"* the *X-MEN* editors, far from attempting to restrain the scripter's evident inclination to utilize any female character available to recapitulate this storyline as often as possible—with predictably mechanical and repetitious results—have actually taken to touting this tendency as an exciting new enticement to buy the magazine. Witness the red box tastefully proclaiming, "We did it before... dare we do it again?" on the cover of *X-MEN #147* (July 1981), the *"Rogue Storm"* issue.

Reprehensible as it may be, Marvel's rush to cash in on the evident audience success of the "great female power equals great disaster" formula so spectacularly utilized by Claremont is at least fairly readily comprehensible. What is at first glance more difficult to understand is why Claremont's high-powered but psychotically weak-conscienced heroines seem to appeal to so many fans, even those who appear to consider themselves feminists. The numerous possible reasons for this, which have as much to do with the equally astonishing popularity of such villainous male characters as the homicidal "superhero" Wolverine and the dastardly TV oil magnate J.R. Ewing as they do with the women's movement-inspired free-floating anxiety about what women may do next discussed earlier in this article, will be discussed in the next installment.•

A QUIET INTERLUDE ON EARTH LEE/KIRBY...

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Maplewood, NJ. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

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Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H 5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Ken Strack, N. 22nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85018; (602) 992-3323.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

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Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

Dec. 4-6. Ed's Coin and Stamp Show. Coins, stamps, comic books, baseball cards. San-Vet Mall Shopping Center, Holbrook, NY. Contact: Ed's Coin & Stamps, 5801 Sunrise Hwy, Sun-Vet Mall, Holbrook, NY 11741.

Dec. 26-30. Comic Book & Sport Card Show. Chapel Hill Mall, Akron, OH. For more information, contact: Bob Bosnyak, 1030 Kling St., Akron, OH 44301.

Dec. 27. Super-Con. Howard Johnson's, 2 George St., Pawtucket, RI (exit 27 off I-95). Hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission: $1.00. For more information contact Sam & Geraldine Galentree, Iron Horse Comics, 834 Hope St., Providence, RI 02906; (401) 521-9343.

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March 21. Super-Con. Howard Johnson's, 2 George St., Pawtucket, RI (Exit 27 off I-95). Hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission: $1.00. For more information contact Sam & Geraldine Galentree, Iron Hose Comics, 834 Hope St., Providence, RI 02906; (401) 521-9343.

March 27-28. Dimension Convention. New York Statler Hilton, NY, NY. Guests include William Gaines, Harvey Kurtzman, Al Feldstein, Will Elder, Stan Lee, Marv Wolfman. Advance membership $8.50 for both days before Dec. 31; $10.00 after. For more info contact: Dimension Conventions, c/o Esco, P.O. Box 400, Bronx, NY 10471.

May 14-16, 1982. Leprecon 8. Caravan Inn, 3333 E. Van Buren St., Phoenix, AZ 85008. Guests include George Barr and William Rotsler. Activities include Wargaming, Panels, Masquerade, and Films. Memberships are $8.00 in advance. For more information, contact: Leprecon 8, P.O. Box 14590, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

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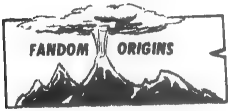
All listing information should be sent to, "Fandom Almanac," *COMICS FEATURE*, 127 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Fandom Zone



by Don and Maggie Thompson

1968

THE YEAR AND THE COMICS

[Note: We want to hear from you about things we've omitted—or about your views of things we can only write about from our own perspective. Moreover, we're soon going to be running out of some information—results of fan voting for favorites in comics after 1970. If you've got lists of such results, how about letting us know? You can write directly to us: Don and Maggie Thompson, 8786 Hendricks Road, Mentor, Ohio 44060.]

Once again, we remind you of what was going on in the world at large—a world in which the microcosm of comics fandom was only a tiny element. In 1968, opposition to the Vietnam war grew, Lyndon Johnson announced he wouldn't run again, and Richard Nixon (saying he had a "secret plan" to end the war) was elected President. The year brought increasing social unrest and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Comics fans Skip Williamson (maced in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention) and Joe Pilati (his nose broken by policemen, while he was covering disturbances in NYC schools for the *VILLAGE VOICE*) were among those whose lives were touched by world events. Many comics fans were drafted and served in Vietnam.

Some fans seemed more concerned that 1968 was the year of *BROTHER POWER THE GEEK* and that comics prices were becoming increasingly unstable. (Gold Key raised its prices to 15¢ and went largely to reprints; Classics Illustrated's line went to a quarter. The only move comics fans applauded from Western was its *WALT DISNEY COMICS DIGEST*, which began in 1968 and reprinted some classic material.) Comics fans operated in a world that held an increasing number of conventions, but one of their focal points was in the midst of disappearing; the fan Academy died, was reborn, and then began to fail again.

In the midst of that, Mark Hanerfield managed to revamp the comics fan awards, get plugs for his balloting from the comics companies, and (in 1969) got 616 fans to cast ballots for their favorites of the year 1968. It was no mean accomplishment, and results ran in *THE COMIC READER #74*.

ALLEY AWARDS FOR 1968

I. Comic Magazine Section

1. Best Adventure Title: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (117 votes)
2. Best Fantasy/SF/Supernatural Title: *DOCTOR STRANGE* (133)
3. Best Western Title: *BAT LASH* (258)
4. Best War Title: *SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS* (253)
5. Best Humor Title: *NOT BRAND ECCH* (348)
6. Best Romance Title: *MILLIE* (28)
7. Best Reprint Title: *MARVEL SUPER-HEROES* (282)

II. Professional Work

1. Best Editor: Stan Lee (348)
2. Best Writer: Stan Lee (255)
3. Best Pencil Artist: Jim Steranko (166)

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FANTASTIC FOUR won for 1968, as well as for Hall of Fame

Fandom Zone

A sample of Jim Steranko's hyper-techno *S.H.I.E.L.D.* work, which appeared in *STRANGE TALES*

4. Best Inking Artist: Joe Sinnott (168)
5. Best Cover: *NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD #6* (86)
6. Best Full-Length Story: TIE: *"Track of the Hook"* (*BRAVE AND BOLD #79*) (31) *"Origin of the Silver Surfer"* (*SILVER SURFER #1*) (31)
7. Best Feature Story: *"Today Earth Died"* (*STRANGE TALES #168*) (55)
8. Best Short Story or Regular Short Feature: *"Tales of the Inhumans"* (*THOR*) (31)
9. Hall of Fame Award: *FANTASTIC FOUR* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (42+ votes) (Important: Mark listed *NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD* by Jim Steranko as the winner with 45 votes. However, he added in his discussion that he had counted separately votes for *"FANTASTIC FOUR* by Jack Kirby" (42 votes), votes for *"FANTASTIC FOUR* by Stan Lee," and votes for *"FANTASTIC FOUR* by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee." Since, at the time the poll was held, *all FF* stories had been done by that duo, the voters obviously meant to pick the *FF* as their Hall of Fame winner.)

III. Popularity Poll

1. Best Adventure Hero Strip: *SPIDER-MAN* (174)
2. Best Adventure Group Strip: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (284)
3. Best Supporting Character: J. Jonah Jameson (147)
4. Best Villain: Doctor Doom (270)
5. Best Strip: Silver Surfer (166)
6. Strip Most Needing Improvement: *X-MEN* (55)
7. Strip Most Desired for Revival: *ADAM STRANGE* (83)

IV. Newspaper Strip Section

1. Best Adventure Strip: *PRINCE VALIANT* (65)
2. Best Human Interest Strip: *MARY PERKINS —ON STAGE* (79)
3. Best Humor Strip: *PEANUTS* (210)
4. Best Humor Panel: *DENNIS THE MENACE* (87)
5. Best Miscellaneous Strip: *FEIFFER* (23)
6. Hall of Fame Award: *PEANUTS* by Charles Schulz (64)

V. Fan Activity Section

1. Best Limited Reproduction Fanzine: *CONCUSSION* (37)
2. Best Unlimited Reproduction Fanzine: *GRAPHIC STORY MAGAZINE* (51)
3. Best Fan Artist: John Fantucchio (71)
4. Best Fan Writer: Larry Herndon (18)
5. Best Fan Project: Alley Awards (47)

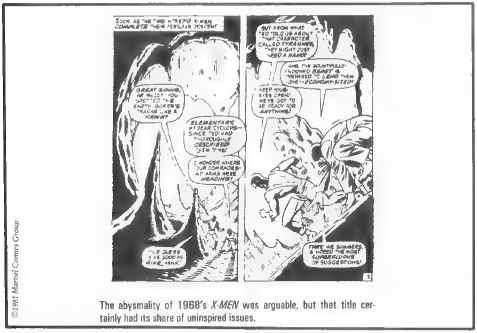
(In case you wondered: Yes, *X-MEN* was truly abysmal in those days. Roy Thomas was shortly to zap life into it, ably aided by Neal Adams' artwork. Following that brief moment of glory, the young super-heroes would sink into the slough again—only to be improved once more years later. Isn't it marvelous what influence the fan awards had—provoking a comic's improvement *twice*?)

You'll notice that Marvel once again showed itself to be the fans' favorite. *BAT LASH* and *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD* were exceptions. The former was a delightful and inventive rip-off of the movie *WATERHOLE #3*, which had come out in 1967. You won't find *BAT LASH* commanding high prices, even in Overstreet's latest listings, but it showed what could be done with derivative material by introducing a fresh format. Nick Cardy's lighthearted art complemented Sergio Aragones' and Denny O'Neil's layouts and scripts. It was, however, a short-lived delight. (Remember, those were the days in which fan interest didn't provide enough circulation to make a difference in saving titles.) It ran only seven issues. *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #79*'s "Track of the Hook" was a continuation of another fan favorite, Deadman—here teamed with Batman and hunting the Hook. Fan favorite Neal Adams did the art, to top if off and give it a spot among the winners of the year's fan voting.

NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD began in 1968 under its own title; it had been running as a feature in *STRANGE TALES*. Jim Steranko did only four issues of the title on its own, but his imaginative work brought him many fan followers.

1968 was an interesting year for comics outside comic books, as well. *"Fritz the Cat"* by Robert Crumb was appearing in *CAVALIER* magazine. *BONER'S ARK* began running in newspapers across the nation. And *YELLOW SUBMARINE* popularized even further a comic-book-y style—this time in the form of Peter Max's designs. Harold Gray, creator of *LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE*, died of cancer May 9 at the age of 74. He had intended that Daddy Warbucks die with him, but the syndicate overruled that dying wish, and Robert Leffingwell continued the strip for a time.

As we indicated in our coverage of 1967, 1968 brought other losses in the field. King Comics died in 1968. DC's



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The abysmality of 1968's *X-MEN* was arguable, but that title certainly had its share of uninspired issues.

BLACKHAWK, which had run 243 issues since its birth as *UNCLE SAM* for Quality Comics in Autumn 1941, succumbed despite an abortive attempt to turn its characters into superheroes with awful costumes—and despite the last-minute second-guessing that restored their former costumes just before the end. (An attempt to revive the characters in the late seventies was no more successful. The time has apparently passed in which a freelance military team is looked on with admiration by America's youth.)

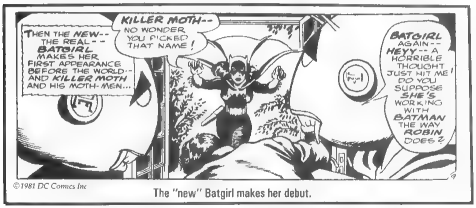
The circulation of *BATMAN* was in a steady decline; artificially inflated by the television series, it dropped steadily as the show dropped in popularity. The show's last broadcast was March 14. In its spurt of popularity, it affected the course of the comic book—and the title was left with such changes as the new Batgirl (played on TV by Yvonne Craig). There had been an old Bat-Girl in the comic-book stories of the early sixties, but she hadn't been Commissioner Gordon's librarian daughter, Barbara. Fans who had objected to the comics line's picking up the "Bam! Pow! Sock!" effects of the TV show were grimly I-told-you-so-ing about the plunging circulation figures.

Not that fans were delighted with most other comics coming out. Mike Barrier, for example, made the following remarks (published in November's *NEWFANGLES*):

> "[*FANTASTIC FOUR #82* is] still far and away the best Marvel, and the best issue in some months, but...Here we have another madman who wants to conquer the world with a fantastically powerful weapon and has put the FF out of action, albeit temporarily. Somehow it sounds familiar. Gold Key publishes mummies, comics that are the preserved remains of titles that were killed by reprints and hack artists, writers and editors; DC publishes zombies, books that are dead and outdated but given the semblance of life through flashy layouts and a rapid turnover in personnel, as well as superficial changes in the characters. Marvel is still alive, but it's tired, and slumping into the repetition and formula stories that soon smothers other publishers. I find only three Marvel titles readable any more, and even they frequently stumble."

We were connected with one event that was to have a delayed effect: In the fall we mimeographed 450 copies of our fanzine *COMIC ART*. It was the seventh issue, and its bulk was devoted to the work of Carl Barks, creator of Uncle Scrooge and one of the true geniuses of the funny-animal world. Until that issue was published, only a handful of fans knew so much as the name of the man who was most widely known as "the good artist" of Western Printing's Disney ducks. Walt Disney had died two years earlier; it was not until after his death that his organization encouraged public discussions of the people who had labored anonymously for years, signing Walt's name to their work, their own creations.

Until *COMIC ART #7*, the bulk of comics fandom's attention was directed towards the super-hero. After that, collectors began to see other directions in which to go, and the super-hero fan did not hold sole sway in the hobby. Unfortunately, this meant that prices on the previously unfashionable funny-animal comics began to keep pace with prices on adventure comics. Somehow, that still seems a small price to pay for the ability to know the man behind the work that brought delight to a generation of children. •



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The "new" Batgirl makes her debut.

Next Month:

"Conan Arrives, but *All In Color* Doesn't—Quite"

QUALIFIED PRAISE

by Carl Docks

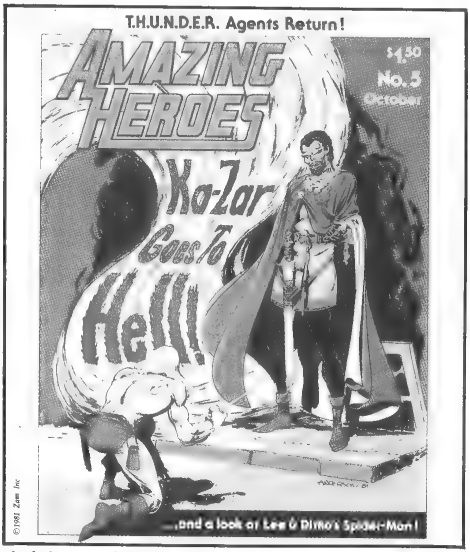
AMAZING HEROES #5, October, 1981. Available for $2.00, or $11.95 for twelve issues, from Zam, Inc., PO Box 4656, Stamford, CT 06907.

These folks—Mike Catron and Peppy White—are doing a pretty good job of covering comics old and new. Most of the news is developed into articles with plenty of background information; more gossipy things about the characters and creators—like who's guest-starring in whose book, and who's writing and drawing it—are reserved for smaller sections. The layout is pretty clean, if a bit conservative.

Each issue has also had a character history and a feature interview. The character histories have been slanted toward DC, but this time around, they finally give us the obvious choice (especially in light of the imminent reprinting of the original series): the Lee-Ditko Spider-Man. Bob Sodaro's reminiscence of the Golden Age of the character is much less dry than a couple of other histories *AH* has published (notably the original *"Dial 'H' for Hero,"* a series that begs not to be taken seriously), and a lot more fun. Instead of stepping back and taking a detached, scientific look at the series, he simply explains why he enjoyed it. Oddly enough, this approach actually works.

David M. Singer presents an opinion piece on the recent issues of *SUPERMAN*, spending most of the article continuity-picking. I think he takes the stories too seriously when he says, "My emotions and expectations have been violated" of the *"Return of Pa Kent"* sequence in *ACTION*. Singer makes a few interesting points here and there, but his tendency to overreact to these matters hurts his cases.

The feature interview is actually three —Louise Jones, Bruce Jones, and Brent Anderson, the staff of *KA-ZAR*. (By the way, for those who are confused, "feature interview" means that the interviews are rewritten into a comprehensible article rather than left as a transcription.) Most of the article is taken by the staffers' notes on where they intend for the series to go. Catron does a nice job of wrapping the background material around the quotes. It is nothing very in-



depth, but you're likely to read a few things here first.

Other regular features are "Coming Distractions" (the mandatory Coming Comics listing), and reprints of *STAR HAWKS* and *STAR WARS*. The strips, in my opinion, are wasted space; I'd rather see something original—or something old enough to be worth reprinting.

AMAZING HEROES will soon be getting a new editor, in the person of Kim Thompson, former editor of *THE COMICS JOURNAL* and *WOWEEKAZOWIE!* He has a good foundation to work with; I'll be looking forward to future issues.

If you would like your publication to be reviewed here just send two copies to: QUALIFIED PRAISE, 127 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, Ma. 02138. Ideally we'd like to see two different issues in order to comment about your editorial development and direction, although we are more than happy to review first issues of any new magazine.

LOST LOVES #1
4¼ x 5¼, 16 pgs., 75¢ plus 18¢ stamp from Will Meugniot, 13906 Ventura Blvd., Suite 170, Sherman Oaks, CA 91423.

LOST LOVES is a "good girl art" zine devoted almost entirely to illustrations. The format is vaguely reminiscent of a Big Little Book, with a small amount of text at the bottom of a left hand page followed by a full-page illustration on the facing right hand page. The text comes from old pulps, along the lines of *PARIS NIGHTS* and *SNAPPY*.

The illustrations capture the feel of the text pieces. They feature lots of cheesecake, generally of women in underwear. A couple actually go as far as totally-nude women who are tastefully clothed in nothing more than a few conveniently placed shadows.

Meugniot's style resembles Mike Vosburg's somewhat, and is well suited to the subject matter. The linework is careful and decorative, the backgrounds generally are detailed and well-composed. If cheesecake is your interest, this zine contains fine examples of the genre.

The cover of *LOST LOVES*—you can really tell what this book is like from its cover.

THE R. CRUMB CHECKLIST, through 1981, by Don Fiene. 172 pages, 7" x 10"; paperback, $10.95, hardcover, $35.95. Published by Boatner Norton Press, c/o The Million Year Picnic, 99 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

To tell you the truth, I've never been much of a fan of underground comix in general. But there have been a few standouts for me. My favorite was Vaughn Bode; one of the others I always liked was Robert Crumb.

Now, I can find out what I've missed from my random forays into his work. Here it all is. Not the artwork itself, of course—but the listing of where to find it.

The listings are pretty easy to follow, and in alphabetical order, to facilitate this being used as a checklist. I would not call the volume "lavishly illustrated," but it isn't skimpy either—you'll find a full-pager every three or four double-page spreads. It's a fair representation of his work, as far as I can tell, with examples drawn from lots of sources. There's a four-page color section in the middle; I'd've liked to see more of Crumb's color work, but, perhaps in the next volume...

The checklist is heavily cross-referenced, to help in tracking down virtually anything you could be interested in. As noted before, the listings are easy to follow, and are also fairly readable on their own. You may have problems deciphering the many abbreviations Fiene uses,

but the only really annoying thing about them is the quantity; otherwise, they're easy to figure out.

Obviously, Crumb doesn't appeal to everyone. Unless you particularly hate his work, though, this is a fun volume to pick up and flip through, and it sustains repeated reading.

STARJACK, 44 pp., 5½ x 8½. Available from Dwight R. Decker, 196 W. Haviland Lane, Stamford, CT 06903; $2 postpaid.

In CF *#12/13*, I reviewed *WEIRD FAAN FICTION #5*, evidently showing in the process that I enjoyed the genre. Dwight Decker took the time to send me *STARJACK*, which he published in late 1979.

I'd like to say something like, "Suffice to say that this is an example of Dwight Decker faan fiction," and let it go at that. I almost *could;* it's a good piece. But it's good for some different reasons.

You see, this story is a series of cliches, strung together in a way that is relevant to fans. Jack Tremaine, the main character, is in high school, and the junior prom is coming up. And, well, you know what it was like being a comics fan in high school—well, it wasn't any easier in October of 1967. The story has The Beautiful Girl, The Plain Girl, The Loyal Friends, The Bully, The Parents—the stock characters. And the story, while not limited to comics fans, is an idea with which a majority of fans can identify.

And it's done *perfectly*, dammit. This is the perfect wish-fulfillment story.

STARJACK gives you a chance to go back to those days and do it the way it was supposed to be done. Not even the way it was usually done. This story is fantasy-come-true.

The story has its heels in reality, though. It's not all cake. The characters have pain. They get in trouble. The relationships go through strained periods. Sometimes they come out stronger; sometimes they snap.

STARJACK is illustrated by Kubert School graduate Sam Kujava, who is now writing a column for *THE COMIC READER* and doing free-lance illustration. The illos seem a little stiff in places, but for the most part, they do a good job of showing the characters doing things which establish character. One problem is that there is one illustration per chapter, and the layout artist (presumably Decker) put the illustration *before* each chapter—thereby disrupting the careful pacing of the story.

To complete the story, a "Where-are-they-now?" section is added to the end, *a la ANIMAL HOUSE*. There are no surprises, but it is a nice touch.

STARJACK is not the ultimate faan fiction story. It is, however, an astoundingly satisfying story. If you don't enjoy this, it's because you spent too much time dissecting it. Sit back and enjoy it.●

20 Years Ago this Month

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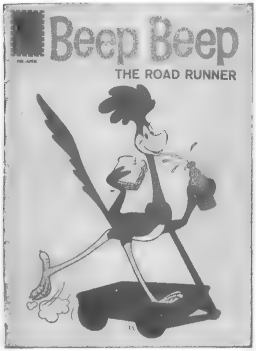

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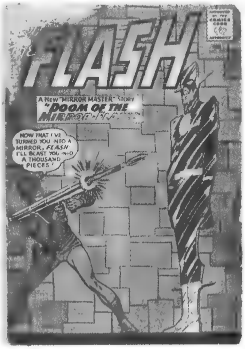

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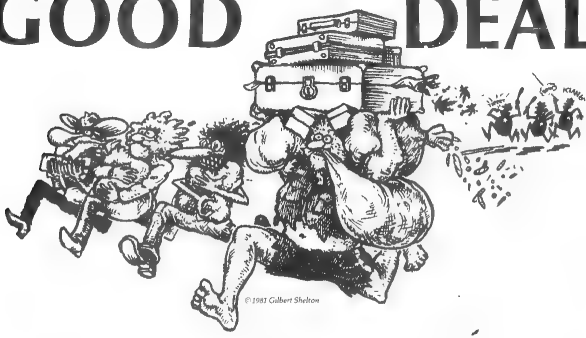
A RIP OFF IS A GOOD DEAL



AN OVERVIEW OF RIP-OFF COMICS

by Bryan Uhlenbrock

Our subject for today is the avoidance and outright destruction of categories. Personally, I've never much cared for the darned things, and have spent a fair amount of my life defying them. I much prefer to deal with people and things on a one-to-one basis. Nonetheless, it seems to me that most comics fans can be separated into two distinct categories: those who read "underground" comics, and those who don't.

There are several reasons for fandom's self-inflicted segregation. Primary among these, of course, is the age barrier. One must be eighteen or older in order to legally purchase most undergrounds, and many comics fans simply do not fulfill this requirement. Additionally, fans of the mainstream (or "overground") comics companies tend to prefer super-hero material, which is understandably law-and-order oriented. Underground comics, on the other hand, are by their very nature somewhat anarchistic. Sex, drugs, and radical politics are the staples of the underground, with rock music and social satire providing a sub-text. There is, of course, a certain overlap between the overground and the underground, but it is minimal at best. For the most part, fans of mainstream comics regard the underground as being a haven for drug fiends and sexual degenerates, while those who read and produce underground comics view the output of the mainstream companies as both childish and repressive.

It is not my intention to champion either of these viewpoints. I read and enjoy both the over- and the undergrounds. As a devotee of the art of graphic storytelling, it is my opinion that anyone who dismisses either genre out-of-hand is unnecessarily depriving him- or her- self of a great deal of enjoyment.

Those overground fans who are interested in expanding their choice of reading material would be well-advised to "test the waters" with an issue or two of *RIP-OFF COMICS*. *RIP-OFF* is an anthology book which cleverly evokes

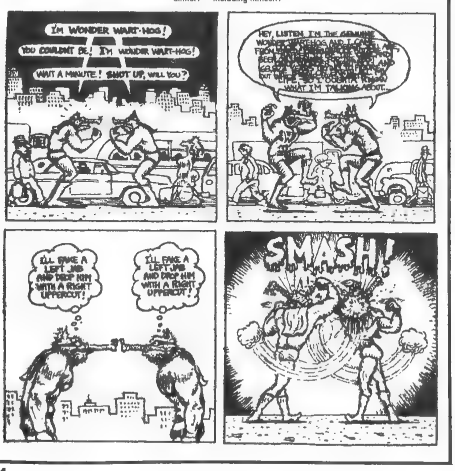
images of a "straight" comic gone 'round the bend. While most underground anthologies vary their contents (and even their creators) outrageously from one issue to the next—thereby sacrificing any semblance of a coherent editorial policy—RIP-OFF has maintained the same lead features (as well as many of its secondary strips) throughout most of its run. In addition to regularly presenting the adventures of *THE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK BROTHERS* (the underground's most well-known and best-beloved feature), *RIP-OFF COMICS* also provides a superhero of sorts in its package, as a concession to those who desire a gaudily-costumed figure in their comic books. I refer, of course, to that pig among swine, the Prince of Porkers—*Wonder Wart-Hog!*

RIP-OFF COMICS #1, in fact, should be required reading for all super-hero fans. Its cover story, *"Wonder Wart-Hog Goes on Welfare,"* features a meeting (and battle) of titans, as the Hog of Steel encounters his "childhood heroes"—Superior-man, Captain Marvelous, Dingbatman, Wondrous Woman, and several others—in a welfare line that is described as being ¼ mile in length. Gilbert Shelton, creator of both Wonder Wart-Hog and the

Fat Freddy Freak (left), Freewheelin' Franklin Freak (center), and Phineas Freak (right) "are counter-culture role models of the highest order."

Freak Brothers, wisely avoids inferring that these gray-haired, pot-bellied super-beings are in any way senile or out-dated. The strip is instead given over to a dissection of Wonder Wart-Hog as a "reactionary," despised for his "ageist and sexist attitudes." Finally, the Hog is revealed as an equal-opportunity destroyer: "He'll punch out *anyone* that gets between him and his dinner!".

Gilbert Shelton's Wonder Wart Hog: "He'll punch out *anyone* that gets between him and his dinner!"—including himself!



The premiere issue of *RIP-OFF COMICS* also features *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* in *"The Parakeet That Outwitted the D.E.A.,"* by Shelton and Joe E. Brown—a story which absolutely defies description. The Freak Brothers, for those who have spent the last fifteen years in a cultural vacuum, are: Phineas Freak (distinguished by his dark, frizzy hair and beard, his glasses, and his outrageously oversized nose...not to mention his hair-brained, knee-jerk radical politics), Fat Freddy Freak (distinguished by his ravenous appetite and his total lack of pride or ethics), and Freewheelin' Franklin Freak (distinguished by his cowboy hat and his take-charge attitude). They are occasionally accompanied (and sometimes outwitted) by Fat Freddy's Cat; they smoke, toot, and otherwise ingest copious amounts of dope...and they are totally incapable of holding a normal job of any sort. Needless to say, they are counter-culture role models of the highest order. Their anti-authority stance is generally vindicated by the hypocrisy of the authority-figures they encounter (as one D.E.A. agent remarks in *RIP-OFF #1*, "If that's parakeet seed in that bag, I'm an honest man!") Theirs is a world where the impossible is possible and the outrageous, commonplace. Even the most arrow-straight anti-doper should therefore be able to read their adventures without rancor, for *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* is, at heart, a fantasy strip—and a damn funny strip as well, no matter *what* your politics may happen to be.

Next up in *RIP-OFF #1* is *The Casebook of Dr. Feelgood*, by Foolbert Sturgeon (an obvious pen-name—Sturgeon's true appelation is Frank Stack). *"Feelgood"* is a blithe exercise in reverse-racism, wherein the Doctor—an overweight, cigar-smoking black man without any legitimate credentials—dispenses pop psychology and the common folks' wisdom to his neurotic, white-middle-class patient, Dorman Grammit. This

episode of the *Casebook* (which, like most of *RIP-OFF's* features, has appeared in various underground comics prior to *RIP-OFF COMICS #1*) introduces the reader to Dorman's Doggie, Ping—a "sissy creep" of a poodle who is described as being "queer for cats." This enrages Grammit tremendously, as he insists that "a man's dog is part of his image." The Doctor, of course, sets things right...so right, in fact, that *Dorman's Doggie* takes over *Feelgood's* spot in the next few issues of *RIP-OFF COMICS*.

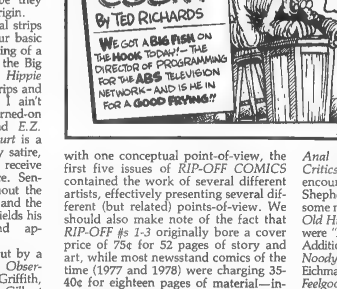
Sturgeon's work seems to have been designed so that each page may be read separately from its comrades, with a punch-line at the bottom of every page and a quick re-cap at the top. This is probably done so that his work can appear, a page at a time, in various underground newspapers via the Rip-Off stalwarts, notably Gilbert Shelton—but Sturgeon uses this technique with less narrative success than does Shelton. The page-to-page flow of Sturgeon's material is sometimes impaired by this convention, something which seldom (if ever) occurs with Shelton's offerings. Foolbert Sturgeon's work, then, has its flaws as well as its strengths. Thankfully, among those strengths is a more thoughtful approach than is seen in most comics, be they aboveground or underground in origin.

RIP-OFF #1 also features several strips by Ted Richards: *E.Z. Wolf* (your basic backwoods funny-animal, something of a cross between Snuffy Smith and the Big Bad Wolf), *The Forty Year Old Hippie* (whose motto is, "Two hundred trips and they've all been *bummers*—but I ain't givin' up yet!"), *Dopin' Dan* (a turned-on soldier in "today's army"), and *E.Z. Wolf's Kangaroo Court*. The *Court* is a splendid exercise in contemporary satire, wherein various social offenders receive their well-deserved come-uppance. Sentencing in this court occurs without the benefit of either lawyers or jury, and the judge—a kangaroo, of course—wields his authority both ruthlessly and appropriately.

Finally, the book is rounded out by a few pages' worth of *The Griffith Observatory* (a social satire strip by Bill Griffith, creator of Zippy the Pinhead), *Gilbert Shelton's Advanced Motoring Tips* (which takes Shelton's fondness for cars and motorcycles to outrageous extremes), Dave Sheridan's *Nerds* (a motley collection of idiots from outer space, whose major distinguishing feature is their large, floppy ears), and a few non-series strips by Justin Green (one of which deals with Col. Sanders, an object of continuing fascination for Green).

This is quite a lot of material for one comic book. It is also *RIP-OFF's* strongest selling-point. While too many overground comics are content to stay

RIP-OFF also features some of the most inventive short features ever to appear in any comic book. Here are examples from Bill (*CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE*) Griffith's *Griffith Observatory*, a sometimes caustic but always penetrating look at contemporary society, and Ted Richards' *E.Z. Wolf*, a one page social put-down.



with one conceptual point-of-view, the first five issues of *RIP-OFF COMICS* contained the work of several different artists, effectively presenting several different (but related) points-of-view. We should also make note of the fact that *RIP-OFF #s 1-3* originally bore a cover price of 75¢ for 52 pages of story and art, while most newsstand comics of the time (1977 and 1978) were charging 35-40¢ for eighteen pages of material—interspersed with countless pages of advertising. Although the current issue of *RIP-OFF COMICS* is priced at $1.50, the page-count is unchanged. The reader of *RIP-OFF COMICS* is thus getting both a good deal of material in every book, and a good deal for his dough.

RIP-OFF #2 continued very much in the same vein as its predecessor. The Freak Brothers appeared in a short but fanciful episode entitled *"Phineas Goes to The Store"*; *"Griffith Observatory"* examined *"Religious Nuts," "The Kids of "Today," "The Doomsters,"* and *"The Geniuses,"* while the previous issue had been content with *"Street Crazies," "The Anal Retentives,"* and *"The Art Critics"*)*"Dorman's Doggie"* encountered a street-wise German Shepherd who tried (fruitlessly) to instill some moxie into him, and the *"Forty Year Old Hippie"* was up to his usual tricks, as were *"Fat Freddy's Cat"* and *"The Nerds."* Additionally, Justin Green's *"Rowdy Noody"* considered torturing Adolph Eichmann (but settled for a raccoon); *"Dr. Feelgood"* had a brief, one-page visit from Clark Kent; R. Diggs dealt with women's liberation in *"Terror Under the Bed,"* and Dave Sheridan presented an apocalyptic future world in *3711."* These last two were perhaps the least enjoyable offerings of the issue, in my own opinion...but the book was, finally, redeemed by the *"Wonder Wart-Hog"* tale, *"Epidemic."* Like many of Shelton's best works, *"Epidemic"* would only be unjustly represented by a capsule summary. I will, however, quote one short caption, wherein the reader is informed that "Wonder Wart-Hog takes a capsule from his utility belt and pulls out a quantity of the powerful secret weapon,

If the adventures of the Freak Brothers themselves begin to pall *RIP-OFF* also offers vignettes from the thrilling life of Fat Freddy's scruffy cat.

money." And they say underground comics ain't realistic...

The *"Wonder Wart-Hog"* tale was also the highlight of *RIP-OFF #3*. The *"Freak Brothers"* episode, *"He Who Hesitates,"* was too short to be truly satisfying. It followed by a few pages' worth of *Fat Freddy's Cat*, which was in turn followed by several pages' worth of *The Griffith Observatory* ("*Objective Study*," "*The Normals*," "*The 'Zine Scene*," "*Ostentatious Humility*," "*The Worriers*," and "*Media Addicts*"). *The Forty Year Old Hippie* bummed his way through the next four pages, followed by *"The Wings of Charlie,"* a touching fable by R. Diggs. *Dealer McDope* was next on the agenda, making his first *RIP-OFF* appearance in this issue. (Personally, I don't much care for Dave Sheridan's *Dealer*, which is very much a one-note strip—drugs, drugs, and more drugs, with none of the social satire that makes the similarly-obsessed *Freak Brothers* palatable.) Sheridan's *Nerds* also made a brief appearance, followed by three more forgettable one-pagers: Fred Schrier's *Stupid Stories*, R.L. Rippee's *Luncheon Counters of the Worst Kind*, and J. Michael Leonard's *Star Weevils*.

Finally, the Hog of Steel came onstage in the cover-featured story, *"Return From the Planet of the Pigs,"* I had been among the "really avid Wonder Wart-Hog fans" mentioned in the story's opening caption, who had been wondering about the continuity difficulties posed by the destruction of the Earth in *HYDROGEN-BOMB FUNNIES* and Wonder Wart-Hog's subsequent emigration to the planet Uranus. *"Return From the Planet of the Pigs"* not only resolves what I had thought to be an irreconcilable error in continuity, it also presents a meeting between Wonder Wart-Hog and himself, without any of the Earth-One/Earth-Two footaraw that such a meeting would engender in an over-ground comic. I do not intend to divulge the method by which Shelton accomplishes his manic magic, but I *will* say that the motorcycle race by which the pair of pigs resolve their differences is quite apt, considering *Wonder Wart-Hog*'s early publishing history. (The Hog of Steel once saw print in, of all things, a racing magazine.)

The *"Freak Brothers"* offering in *RIP-OFF COMICS #4* finally gave the Hog of Steel a bit of competition for the honor of providing the funniest story in the issue. *"The 4th Freak Brother"* pulled together several disparate story elements into one laugh-filled tour-de-farce: a missing police officer, an alleged terrorist plot, a big dope run, and the titular fourth Freak Brother all figured prominently in this eight-page outrage. *The Kangaroo Court*, *The Griffith Observatory* ("*Noo Yawkahs*" and "*The Rednecks*"), *Dealer McDope*, and *Dorman's Doggie* were all on hand in *#4*, as was R. Diggs' *Mom Squad*, a mish-mash combination of feminism, ecological awareness, and space-wars silliness.

Unfortunately for the *Freak Brothers*' hopes of satirical superiority over their swinish comrade-in-comedy, *RIP-OFF #4* contained perhaps the funniest *Wonder Wart-Hog* story ever to see print. *"Sudden Death"* is the story of pro football rookie W.W. Hog, who has "absolutely *no* experience, but he's *eight-foot nine* and weighs *six hundred twenty*, so who needs it?" Philbert Desanex, the Hog of Steel's alter-ego, has an important role in this story, as do lawyers, contracts, and millions of dollars. To my mind, the most hilarious moments of this story occur with the Hog's first appearance in an professional football game...as described by a trio of sportscasters and various other forms of mass media. A one-page *Cartoon Cavalcade* spot by Joel Beck rounded out the issue...but by that time, it was all an afterthought: the big pig had once again stolen the show.

RIP-OFF #5 was something of a disappointment after the first four invariably amusing issues. The problem here, I think, is that the majority of the issue was given over to R. Diggs' wooden *Mom Squad* and a non-series effort by Dave Sheridan, *"Time Twisted Tales."* Although Sheridan is perhaps the best artist yet to appear in *RIP-OFF COMICS*, his writing simply does not engage the reader as does Shelton or Sturgeon's material. Another problem with *RIP-OFF #5* is the brief amount of space allotted to the book's best features. *The Griffith Observatory* was confined to one short page ("*Think Eighties*"), as was *The Forty Year Old Hippie*. Joel Beck's *Cartoon Cavalcade* was given two pages in which to strut its stuff, and the rest of the issue contained the by-now obligatory *FREAK BROTHERS* and *WONDER WART-HOG* stories. Thankfully, both were in peak form.

The *Freak Brothers* offering, *"Take Me Out..."*, involved a slow-pitch softball league, a thrown game (for betting purposes), and Fat Freddy's legendary lack of self-respect. The *Wonder Wart-Hog* tale was another must-read selection for super-hero fans, as Philbert Desanex, accidentally foiling an attempt-

ed bank robbery, decided to cash in on his new-found notoriety by establishing *"The Famous Super-heroes School."* The names of the mail-order heroes he creates are worth the price of the book in and of themselves: Mister Myopic, Buick Man, The Human Hockey Puck, and The Masked Martyr lead the list for all-out silliness, with the likes of Mildew Man and Super Schmuck following close behind. When Philbert is accosted by legions of dissatisfied costumed customers, there can only be one response: *"This* appears to call for the talents of WONDER WART-HOG!"

RIP-OFF COMICS #6 was something of a departure from the book's established style. For one thing, the entire issue was the work of Gilbert Shelton; for another, Wonder Wart-Hog was nowhere to be seen. The *"Freak Brothers"* tale chronicled *"The Death of Fat Freddy"* (don't despair, Freddy fans—the obese one was revived by story's end); *"Fat Freddy's Cat"* and *Gilbert Shelton's Advanced Motoring Tips"* were also on hand. The bulk of the issue, however, was taken up by the brilliant surrealism of *"Philbert Desanex' 100,000th Dream."* This story cannot be praised highly enough. If you are among those who are displeased by the formulaic approach of most over-ground comics, you should read *"Philbert Desanex' 100,000th Dream"* simply to jolt you out of your cultural quagmire.

RIP-OFF #7 was also a pattern-breaker in that neither *Wonder Wart-Hog* nor (strictly speaking) *The Freak Brothers* appeared within its pages. *Dealer McDope* took over the cover spot for that issue with *"The Triangle Tryst."* I found this particular episode of *D. McD.* more amusing than usual, if only for one reason: shipwrecked in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle, the Dealer and his friends are rescued by a dreadlocked Rastafaraiian, whose ship is named the "Highly Selassie." (If you are unfamiliar with reggae music and Rasta culture, the joke would go right over your head. Personally, I though it was high-larious.)

Instead of the Freak Brothers, *Fat Freddy's Cat* was given center stage in *RIP-OFF #7*, with an adventure entitled *"The Sacred Hands of Pootwaet."* Fat Freddy, inspired by the legend of Dick Whittington and his cat, resolves to pull the same scam in an oil-rich (Arabian) nation. This story is somewhat marred by anti-Moslem propaganda (understandable, as it first saw print during the Iranian hostage incident), with "the Ab-

What comic book fan hasn't dreamed of joining *"The Famous Super-heroes School"?* Shelton deftly plays upon the readers' fantasies with the result that the mail-order heroes he creates in this Wonder Wart Hog masterpiece are worth the price of *RIP-OFF #5* in and of themselves.

©1981 Gilbert Shelton

ba-Dabba Yucca-Ducca Hifalutin Hoochy-Doochy...spiritual and temporal master of every soul in Pootweet," the "Holy Gobbledygook," and other obvious digs at a religion which Gilbert Shelton shows little knowledge of and even less respect for...but we shall be generous. It's something of a treat to see such obviously pro-American bias in a genre which is usually accused of being anti-American. We shall, on that basis, forgive Mr. Shelton for this particular example of rabid xenophobia.

A few short strips by R. Diggs are also included in Rip-Off #7, as are several installments of Joel Beck's *Cartoon Cavalcade* and a generous selection of *The Griffith Observatory* (*"Are You a Boozhie," "The Mansard-Roof Syndrome," "Snap Judgements," "New York Again," "Useless Objects," "The Stupidity Patrol," "Time Warped," "Five Great Moments in the Life of Jimmy Durante," "Where's the Party?" and "People Watching"*). Unfortunately, Bill Griffith then chose to retire the *Observatory*—for the time being, at least. This reviewer can only hope that he has a change of heart. The *Observatory* was generally quite accurate in lampooning its selected targets, without once succumbing to self-righteousness. A modern masterpiece of social satire, *The Griffith Observatory* will definitely be missed.

The final story in *RIP-OFF #7*, *"Looking for Dr. Feelgood,"* brings Dorman Grammit back to the good Doctor's cozy couch. Grammit, it seems, has been having some disturbing erotic dreams, fraught with identity crises, sexual confusion, and repressed racism. The dream he describes to Dr. Feelgood involves a Tarzan movie shot on location in Africa, with Grammit himself playing the part of a rather wimpy ape-man. The Doctor is obviously displeased by this twisted (but revealing) tale, and when Grammit winds up his self-analytical monologue by concluding, "Like many others of my generation, I am, as they say, 'in a bag!'", Feelgood's response is direct and to the point. "Why doan we take a liddle break," he suggests. "I gonna' shoot a few games uv eight-ball. When I cum back in a couple hours I he'p you out'a yo *bag!*" The camera then pulls back to reveal Grammit, all trussed up and literally enveloped in a gigantic garbage

bag. "Not very funny, Dr. Feelgood!", Grammit raves helplessly.

This is probably Sturgeon's most powerful work to date. Nothing is held back in the interest of making Grammit more acceptable to the reader. If we are to identify with him, we must come to terms with the darker parts of our own psyche; if we reject him, we are also rejecting ourselves and our own culture. This is unpleasant stuff, perhaps, but it is also undeniably meaningful. More sessions with the Doctor are definitely prescribed.

Now we come to the most recent issue, *RIP-OFF COMICS #8. The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* lead off the book with *"Phineas Gets an Abortion,"* a dream-fantasy in which Phineas impregnates a 16-year-old girl whose father (luckily) happens to be filthy rich. When the enraged grandfather-to-be comes up with $20,000 for a secret abortion, Phineas enlists the aid of an old friend from the 1960s—a radical, of course, who transplants the foetus into Phineas' body, along with an artifical womb. Things go from crazy to crazier, and Phineas is ultimately threatened by a rebellion in the nursery, whereupon he loses his "inbred sense of pacificism" before finally awakening.

Foolbert Sturgeon provides an episode of his infamous *"New Adventures of Jesus"* series in *RIP-OFF #8*, and it is advertised as being "the first new *Jesus* strip in nearly a decade." Sturgeon's version of Jesus is little more than a hippie with a halo; and in this story, *"Jesus and the Bank Robbers,"* the Son of God shelves his "flawless moral principals" while investigating conditions in the old west. Without realizing it, Jesus gets caught up in a bank robbery, and ends up on the business end of a noose. The moral to this story: "Even when you're omnipotent, you have to stay on your toes to keep out of trouble!" Personally, I'd have rather seen the second coming of *Dorman's Doggie*.

This issue of *RIP-OFF COMICS* contains several firsts. In addition to presenting "the first *Jesus* strip in nearly a decade," it is the first to contain a reprint: the *Wonder Wart-Hog* story, *"Battle of the Titans"* was originally presented in 1967's hard-to-find *WONDER WART-HOG MAGAZINE. "Battle"* is a four-way tag-team match between the Hog of Steel, his younger brother, Paranoid Punkpig ("who, as we all know, is fully capable of becoming a useful member of society through modern social rehabilitation—or, if that fails, through pre-frontal lobotomy"); Piltdown Pig, who was placed in suspended animation during prehistoric times through a tyically unbelievable comic-book method; and a future wart-hog by the name (?) of 7839-61-46-108. One more first for *RIP-OFF COMICS*: the story ends with a cliff-hanger and the imperishable words, "Continued Next Issue!"

And still another first: *RIP-OFF #8* contains the beginning of a new regular feature, "Cartoonists of the World." Since *RIP-OFF* editor Gilbert Shelton has been "vacationing" (some might call it "residing") in Europe for the past few years, this feature was perhaps inevitable. "Each issue," sayeth the inside-front-cover hype, "we'll spotlight rarely-seen artists from a different country overseas." *RIP-OFF #8*'s "International" section is dedicated to British comix. *"Spotty Dick,"* by Leo Baxendale, was the first (and in my opinion, the weakest) of the lot. *"Dick"* was overlong, content to repeat the same joke over and over again, and more than a trifle perverse. The single-page offering by Savage Pencil (Edwin Pouncey to his Mum), on the other hand, was brilliant. Pencil's work covers the English rock scene in a hyperkinetically bizarre, absolutely unique fashion. *"The-Eyes McGurk and his Death Planet Commandos,"* by Kurt Vile and Pedro Henry, is very much the sort of thing that one would expect to see in *HEAVY METAL. "The Wacky World of Wildlife,"* by Edward Barker, is quite amusing in my opinion—ecologically oriented and somewhat understated. The few strips that were presented left me desiring more. *"The Lone Groover,"* by Tony Benyon, is another music-oriented strip. Benyon's work is far more "normal" than Savage Pencil's, but no less humorous. The two-page offering by Chris Welch was undistinguished but acceptable nonetheless, while Hunt Emerson's "Tower" was quite impressive. (Evidently, the folks at *RIP-OFF* agreed, since Emerson's book, *THUNDER-DOGS*, was recently published under the *RIP-OFF* imprint.) Finally, the two-page offering by Terry Gilliam was terribly funny, as befits a seasoned performer with *MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS*.

As interesting as the bulk of this "imported" material is, I must admit that I would prefer to see more work by Ted Richards, Bill Griffith, Joel Beck, and the like. Perhaps the Rip-Off Press could be persuaded to devote an entire title to these "furriners" so that *RIP-OFF COMICS* can retain its welcome air of familiarity...something which sets it apart from most underground comics. One way or the other, *RIP-OFF* will undoubtedly continue to be one of the most important titles on the newsstands today, and well worth its cover price no matter *how* badly inflation ravages our collective pocketbooks.•

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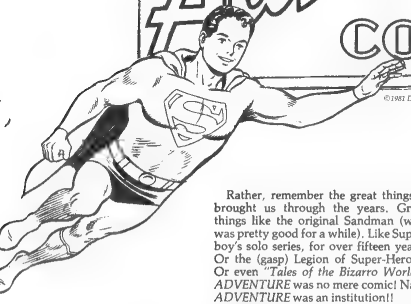

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A Eulogy by Paul Balze

An era has ended.

An era that lasted forty-six years, through good times and bad, through war and peace, through three generations of comics readers.

I speak, of course of the cancellation of *ADVENTURE COMICS* after 490 issues. But, don't dwell on the fact that, in less than a year, it would have been only the third DC comic ever to reach 500 issues. Forget about the fact that it was the oldest, the longest-running of all comics.

Rather, remember the great things it brought us through the years. Great things like the original Sandman (who was pretty good for a while). Like Superboy's solo series, for over fifteen years! Or the (gasp) Legion of Super-Heroes! Or even *"Tales of the Bizarro World."* *ADVENTURE* was no mere comic! Nay, *ADVENTURE* was an institution!!

And now it's gone. Killed by bad sales. Four and a half decades, down the toilet. And how?? *How??* Probably because it failed to keep a familiar name on the cover, one easily recognizable to the general public. Alas. . . the magazine that spawned the mighty Legion, KILLED!! Dragged down by a crazy, revamped version of idea that never sold that well *anyway*!! *"Dial 'H' for Hero"*!! God!

How revolting!

But, do not weep for *ADVENTURE COMICS*. Even though its beginnings predated the true Golden Age of Comics by three years, it was, after all (as the non-fans say), only a comic book. Never mind that it survived a wartime frequency cutback, the late 1940s super-hero purge, the anti-comics witch-hunts of the 1950s, and some incredibly botched editorial moves in the early 1970s only to be cut down by "The Heroes *YOU* Create!"

Just remember its glory days. Remember those beautiful Jack Burnley *"Starman's*, the youthful innocence of *"Superboy,"* the *"Legion of Super-Heroes"* before they developed heavy moral burdens, *"Supergirl"* as she became a woman. . .

As *ADVENTURE* passes into antiquity, an era ends. And we're all a little older.

R.I.P.
ADVENTURE COMICS
nee NEW ADVENTURE
nee NEW COMICS
Born 1935 Died 1982

As a slight amendment of the above eulogy, shortly before presstime it was announced that DC had decided to continue the *ADVENTURE COMICS* numbering in a new series of reprint digest books, which would probably feature classic reprints from *ADVENTURE COMICS*. This is hardly the same as keeping the comic book alive, but it will allow *ADVENTURE* to reach #500—albeit not in comic book form, and not with new material.

—The Editors

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SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT

by Murray R. Ward

When you find something that works well, try it again.

That seemed to be the formula for success that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were following in the early days of Marvel Comics. Although historical hindsight now shows us that the characters and concepts involved were, or were to become, completely different from one another, the fledgling but vocal fan element of the time made a regular habit of accusing the founders of the Marvel Age of Comics of self-plagiarization. The Hulk, they said, was merely a solo version of the Thing of *FANTASTIC FOUR* fame. Daredevil was too much like Spider-Man, they claimed. The Avengers team was based on the same idea (characters from separate strips uniting) as DC's *JUSTICE LEAGUE*, in their opinions. But the strip that caught the most flak on this charge was the X-Men.

How strange that this super-team which is so unlike any other in comics should be, throughout its history, so often compared to other super-groups, whether published by Marvel or by its competitors.

I ORIGINS

The X-Men's first issue appeared the same month as that of the Avengers, in July of 1963, although many fans tend to think of the X-Men as a younger team, primarily because—due to not being granted monthly status as soon as did

"...it was not the Avengers to which comics readers chose to compare the X-Men, but instead to Marvel's first and flagship title, *FANTASTIC FOUR*." The differences eventually became more apparent than the similarities, however, in this scene from *FANTASTIC FOUR #28*, the two teams duel—and none of the readers got them confused.

THE AVENGERS, and later having been cancelled for a time—the mutant heroes have not had nearly as many issues published as their sister title.

Despite their concurrent origins, though, it was not the Avengers to which comics readers chose to compare the X-Men, but instead to Marvel's first and flagship title, *FANTASTIC FOUR*. Both teams, they wrote in to complain, had a stoic leader with astonishing mental abilities, a brutish member with great physical strength and an inhuman appearance, a brash and foolhardy teenager whose powers had to do with temperature control, and a unrequited love affair between the group's lone and (apparently) lacking-in-power female and another member. The only difference seemed to be that there were five X-Men (six, counting their mentor who took no part in the action) and only four FF members.

As we have seen in previous installments of this series, the X-Men, then and now, have a lot more in common with the FF than the Avengers for obvious reasons. The Fantastic Four are a common-origin team, deriving their powers and *raison d'etre* from a single incident, while the Avengers are a formulated team, a gathering-together of established super-stars from other books. The X-Men each appeared for the first time in comics in their premiere issue, and thus were certainly not recruits from outside comics sources, and while their unique abilities were not gained in a shared accident, as were the FF's, they had a common origin of sorts nonetheless: mutation.

"...the first and most played-up element that made the X-Men an entity separate from other groups ...[was that they] were mutants..." They had a lot of group solidarity, though, as witness a typical recreational scene from issue #4.

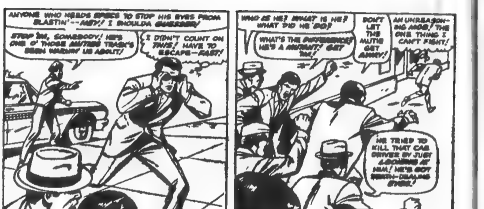
This was the first and most played-up element that made the X-Men an entity separate from the other groups: the X-Men were mutants. At this point, we should examine the Marvel Comics definition of a mutant, which is slightly different from the straight science version of same. According to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, a mutant (of which there are good and evil varieties, each with their own set of goals—which is not quite the same thing as the current Marvel custom of referring to the group as "a team of mutant super-heroes" at least once an issue) was a human born with powers or abilities not possessed by either parent. It was later established that these powers, as a general but not all-encompassing rule, were usually inherent but non-apparent at birth, maturing with the mutant person in adolescence and coming to fruition during puberty. (Necessarily so—since otherwise Scott Summers would have destroyed the hospital in which he was born the moment the doctor whacked

him on the bottom, Bobby Drake would have frozen his poor mother solid in childbirth, etc.) This was a very loose definition (under which even this author would be considered a mutant, having been born left-handed of right-handed parents), but it served to set mutant characters apart from the other Marvel super-doers, all of whom gained their powers in dramatic origin stories that happened to them as adults or near-adults.

So, the X-Men were different because they were mutants. And what did that mean? For one thing, it meant that they were the super-team equivalents of Spider-Man in super-heroic society, rather than being like the Fantastic Four. Whereas the F F were national heroes who openly saved the world on a regular basis and were as famous as movie stars, the X-Men, like Spidey, were feared and distrusted as freaks. After all, you didn't have to go up in a rocket and be exposed to cosmic rays to be a mutant. Anybody could be...one of *them!* The term "witch-hunt" was a familiar one in *X-MEN* stories.

The X-Men also stood apart from other teams because they...well, they stood apart, literally. Despite the all-of-a-kind uniforms of the original group and their common cause as mutants, they were not quite a true common-origin team, since they did not choose to band together so much as they were *forced* to band together for their own well-being. Also, whereas other heroes met and decided by acclamation to remain partners, the X-Men were *recruited* in their teens by their group's organizer, the adult Professor Xavier. Being draftees from birth, so to speak, by dint of their peculiar powers, the X-Men could have evolved into a super-hero version of the Armed Forces, but they didn't. Instead, whereas the Avengers, JLA, and Legion were clubs with members, and the F F and Inhumans were families, the X-Men were a school of students. As such, they remained aloof from the mainstream of Marvel super-heroldom to a large extent, keeping their existence and headquarters a secret—which on the one hand allowed them private lives of sorts in their civilian roles such as the F F could never enjoy, but on the other hand added fuel to the fire of mutant distrust among the general populace of Marvel-Earth.

The origin of the X-Men was such a secret that even the readers had to wait years to learn it, as with the origins of the Justice Society and the Legion of Super-Heroes. Indeed, the full personal history of their founder, Professor X, is



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A common scene in the early *X-MEN* series: "The term 'witch-hunt' was a familiar one..." and the young mutants were kept running.

still being explored and amended, with many incidents as yet undocumented. Charles Xavier styles himself as "perhaps the first...mutant" resultant from his parents' exposure to radiation after the discovery of the atomic bomb in 1945. Actually, since his father, Brian Xavier, died at Alamagordo when Charles was in late childhood, the radiation-exposure must have come in a far earlier stage of the elder Xavier's researches. Charles Xavier's coming-of-age was to be marked with tragedy, despite the fact that his super-normal mental powers, the least of which was telepathy, allowed him to excel at both physical and scholastic endeavors throughout his teens, with the only price paid for such successes being the early loss of his hair as a side-effect of his condition. In college, he would lose his first love, Moira MacTaggert, to another man; as a soldier in Korea, he would witness the apparent demise of his step-brother, Cain Marko (only to later combat the transformed Marko, who had become the unstoppable Juggernaut); still later, roaming the world to "find himself" after these events, he would lose the use of his legs in a revolution against the space-born villain Lucifer. After a period in which he retired, hermit-like, to his mansion in New York's Westchester County, Xavier emerged, albeit secretly, to begin the organization of his training academy for those like himself. *He* had had to cope with the gift and the curse of unwanted extra powers alone; he resolved that—if he could help it—those mutants who came after him would have a guide and teacher in the man who came to be known as Professor X.

The Professor's aims were not wholly altruistic, however. While his "School for Gifted Youngsters," as the X-Men's base was called, would exist to help young mutants cope with the problems of being different (and was ever reader identification so easy to come by as in the exploits of a whole school devoted to kids who were born different from their peers?), equal attention would be given to their training in the use of their powers as a combative force. For one thing, the Professor knew that, had his step-brother survived, the Juggernaut would one day walk the Earth, and it

Professor X explains the aims of the X-Men to an arriving Jean Grey, the last of the original team.

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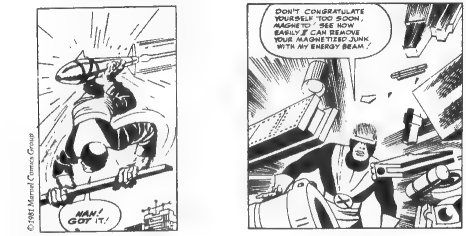
The X-Men, clockwise from left: Iceman, Marvel Girl, Angel, Professor Xavier, Cyclops, and the Beast. The scientific facts about mutation were loosely applied by Lee and Kirby to create some very unlikely extrapolations of normal humanity.



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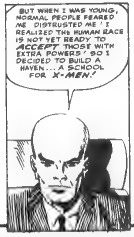

Professor X was the power behind the scenes, not a field commander. Eventually Cyclops took over that role.

would be Xavier's responsibility to halt him. And more immediately important, while Xavier was organizing mutant youths to do good, his opposite number—known only as Magneto—was recruiting his self-styled "Brotherhood of Evil Mutants."

Thus, the original X-Men emerged as a team in their first issue having just acquired their fifth, and—for the time being—final fighting member. Although it was not until a series of back-up strips featured in issues #38-57 (inclusive) that the individual tales of their joining the group would be told, the band in that opening adventure included: Cyclops, a tall, quiet, brooding youth whose eyes emitted a shattering scarlet force beam; Iceman, youngest of the group, who resembled a quick-frozen version of the F F's Human Torch; the Angel, with the power of winged flight and an oversized ego; the Beast, whose acrobatic skill and manual and pedal dexterity (due to his oversized hands and feet) made him seem as much ape as man; and Marvel Girl, whose telekinetic abilities did not manifest themselves in an odd outward appearance as did the others' powers, and who would have melted into the background if not for her status as the sole distaff member. (That meant that in the early issues, she had to fight off the advances of all the other members. As ostracized "freaks," it is perhaps understandable that the male mutants would view the appearance of a *girl* mutant as manna from heaven, but when even Professor X began to think longing thought balloons about her, things were clearly getting out of hand. Fortunately for Jean Grey's nervous constitution, the rivalry quickly narrowed down to Angel and Cyclops, while Marvel Girl herself made obvious her unspoken preference for the latter hero.)

Unlike the F F, who appeared full-blown in their familiar personae, it took the X-Men a few issues to settle down into their respective niches. The team originally had no leader, other than the Professor monitoring their battles from afar telepathically, although it seemed obvious an action commander (or deputy leader, as Xavier termed it) would have to be chosen. For this honor, not all members were potential candidates: Iceman was too young and frivolous-minded, and Marvel Girl was too inexperienced, being the newest member (besides, who in 1963 ever heard of a *girl* leading a super-team? Right, Imra?). Although later flashback stories would take his eventual status for granted, no one was more surprised than Scott Summers when he was appointed to the post, since, as he pointed out, "...the Beast is a better scholar, while Angel is more aggressive." "But you...possess the rare quality of leadership," intoned the Prof. "My decision stands!"

While it could easily be argued that Bobby and Jean took their cues from Johnny and Sue of the F F, as the group's resident "kid" member and "girl" member, respectively, the early X-Men borrowed at least as much from the

Simon and Kirby "kid gang" groups of the 1940s as from the premiere Marvel foursome. Comics history will doubtless view the original X-Men as one in a recurrent string of Jack Kirby Archetypes. As Kirby introduced god-like heroes, monstrous heroes, common-origin teams, and kid-gang groups in the 1940s, and again in the Marvel Age with Thor, Hulk, the F F , and the X-Men (a "kid gang" grown slightly older and gifted with super-powers, but still with an adult mentor, just as the Newsboy Legion had the Guardian and the Boy Commandos had Rip Carter), so would he do so again in the 1970s at DC with the New Gods, the Demon, and the Forever People. As with all such "gangs," and all teams which owe a debt to Doc Savage's Amazing Five, the X-Men would have one extremely strong and/or argumentative member with a colorful speech pattern, and one who spoke as if he had swallowed a thesaurus. For the F F , the Thing was clearly the literary descendant of Scrapper, Brooklyn, and Monk Mayfair, while Reed Richards learned his vocabulary from the aptly-named Big Words, and Johnny Littlejohn. In the X-Men, it seemed obvious that the Beast would be the wise-guy and the Angel, born to wealth and good looks, would be the walking dictionary—and so it was for an issue or two. Then, as the characters established themselves, all charges of F F -imitation were laid to rest as Hank (Beast) McCoy proved to be the team's repository of tongue-tangling *bon mots* (not to mention student of foreign languages), while Angel, if not the wiseacre that the Thing or Hawkeye would become, was the "flaw in the ointment" (as the aforementioned Ben Grimm would phrase it) with his inflated opinion of himself and the morale problems caused by his pursuit of Marvel Girl. Random took the big-footed, big-worded Beast to its collective heart, and Warren (Angel) Worthington III's hat size continued to expand as the letters columns declared him to be the most popular of the group. (Why everyone liked the Angel so much was always a mystery to your humble author, since the ability to fly, with or without wings, was never much cause for loud huzzahs among super-heroes, every other one of whom could take to the air on a whim. At least Hawkman, also a winged champion, had his neat collection of ancient weapons to fall back on as a gimmick.)

As the accusations of copying the Fantastic Four faded into inconsequence, the X-Men immediately began to be instead compared with a team which DC Comics had launched at precisely the same time as the Marvel mutants had made their debut: The Doom Patrol. In retrospect, it must have been primarily the presence of the D P 's leader, the Chief, who—like Professor X—was confined to a wheelchair, that led to the thoughts of cross-company copy-catting between the two groups—that, and the introduction (again at the same time for both groups) of the teams' respective arnemeses. The X-Men fought the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants; the Doom Patrol contested the Brotherhood of Evil. Then too, the D P were subtitled "the Fabulous Freaks," being social outcasts due to their unique appearances and abilities—just as if they were mutants. The two super-teams even each fought a villain named the Mutant-Master, at roughly the same time in their runs, and both titles were cancelled in the late 1960s only to be revived (with rather different degrees of success) in the 1970s. But all this is obvious only on looking back from the 1980s. For all their apparent similarities, the concurrent origins of the X-Men and the D P were as much one of the incredible-but-true coincidences of comics as the simultaneous births, a few years later, of the Vision in *THE AVENGERS* and the Red Tornado in *JUSTICE LEAGUE* (both androids, both red, both caped, both taking their names from Golden Age characters, both pawns of super-villains, both reformed and joined the super-team which they initially opposed, etc.)

II. ORGANIZATION

To return to the original X-Men (their current counterparts will be discussed more properly as a super-team of the 1970s, although the membership roster included with this article includes all members), their position as Marvel's *secret* super-team, as opposed to the extremely public and even government-affiliated F.F. and Avengers, led, we have seen, to some distinct developments in terms of their organization.

Professor X had originally allied himself with the FBI in his initial search for would-be students, but the arrangement was clearly one of data-exchange only, as long as the Professor had an active hand in leading his little troupe. Only when Xavier appeared to have died (a rumor greatly exaggerated) at one point did the bureau attempt to intervene in an authoritative manner in X-Men business. Given the outcome of their interference (they split the group up into units of one or two operatives scattered across the country for a time) and the fact that their "advice" was summarily ignored by the young mutants once it became obvious that the X-Men operated better on their own, it is easy to see why Hoover and Co. and their successors were not a large part of the strip thereafter, except for the occasional veiled hint when Professor X needed a favor from a friend in a high place. As far as the non-super-powered man in the street was concerned, then, the X-Men were as much unrecognized miscreants and outright outlaws as the Magneto-led mutants they opposed.

The X-Men's first mission: stop the evil Magneto, from *X-MEN #1*.

The X-Men have changed *vis-a-vis* their fellow heroes and supporting characters, not to mention John Q. Public, over the years. In the beginning, no one knew that Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters was really the X-Men's mansion headquarters. In the years since, though, this deception has continued to fool only the average citizen. The Juggernaut attacked the team in their base in his first appearance; Magneto, from his exile vantage point in space after his initial defeat (in #11), was able to uncover his foes' hiding-place and lie in wait for them therein (#17); the robotic Sentinels, with the ability to detect mutants at a distance, have had little trouble uncovering the X-Men in most of their battles. As to the other super-heroes, the Prof apparently took Reed Richards into his

An important aspect of the early *X-MEN* series was the emphasis on training the young mutants in the use of their unprecedented powers. In this scene from *X-MEN #4*, Beast runs the gauntlet known as the Danger Room, in which "...computer-controlled menaces of seemingly unending variety...test [the X-Men]'s mettles and abilities..."

confidence after a few meetings between the two, as nowadays the F F's Baxter Building sports a training facility for the members designed by Xavier, while Mr. Fantastic supplies the X-Men with uniforms composed of unstable molecules which adapt to the wearers' individual powers. As of the early 1970s, the Avengers have likewise been privy to the mutant team's secrets, after Professor X called on the assemblers for aid against an attack by Magneto and led them straight to the nicknamed X-Mansion (*AVENGERS #110*). Even the Defenders must have an inkling of the connection between Xavier and X-Men after their alliance with the Prof against Magneto and a new band of followers (*DEFENDERS #15-6*).

Speaking of the team's training facilities which the F F now emulates, the official designation for the X-Men's deadly gymnasium is "the Danger Room." Therein lie the computer-controlled menaces of seemingly unending variety, created by the good professor to test his students' mettles and abilities to use their powers both in tandem and separately. Even the Avengers have a version of the Danger Room in their mansion, though whether Xavier contributed to its design is unclear. More likely, Tony (Iron Man) Stark added the facility after his glimpse of X-Men training techniques when he first met the Angel (*TALES OF SUSPENSE #49*).

While the X-Men may long have had the best training equipment of any Marvel super-team, their aura of secrecy has led to some necessary deficiencies in other areas. One of these is transportation. Although today's team possesses specialized aircraft in a league with the Avengers' quinjets (and rather inexplicably, too), though not the diversity of vehicles used by the F F, the original X-Men were often hard-pressed to get to the scene of their latest battle. Their only regular aircraft was a mere helicopter, and for ground transport—then and now—they use the Professor's Rolls-Royce limousine—a luxurious means of sallying forth to combat, to be sure, but hardly properly inconspicuous for a team of undercover heroes. At one point in their careers, with Professor X kidnapped and the X-Copter wrecked beyond repair (a frequent fate of super-hero vehicles), it took the X-Men several issues to raise tourist-class air fare to the headquarters of their then-current antagonists, the evil mutant organization known only as Factor Three.

Another disadvantage of not being a publicly-recognized super-team is that the X-Men can hardly throw a press conference, as the Avengers often have, to advise the *hoi polloi* of changes in their line-up or official costumes. When, in the early issues, Marvel Girl would change her face mask as often as did the Wasp, or later, when all the members' uniforms would be constantly remodified to include less yellow and more blue (to say nothing of red belts), the group was still more or less recognizable as the X-Men of old. But when they first appeared in public in all-new regalia (in #40), so unfamiliar did they appear that they were forced to reassure anyone who'd never encountered them before that they were indeed the *bona fide* mutant good-guys. As a point of interest, the new costumes introduced at that time were as follows: Cyclops' was predominantly blue and much the same as his current outfit, except for his visor, which was changed for the only time in *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*. Angel's garb featured yellow as its main color (one reader opined that it made him look like a Swiss mountaineer) and began his fashion of baring his blond locks *a la* Captain Marvel, Goliath II, Nomad, *et al*; Warren has since gone through more costume changes than anyone this side of the Wasp, and now wears an attractive streamlined uniform which is a combination of the designs and color schemes of several previous ones, and is mainly red and white (he was, it should be noted, the only X-Man to have worn an individualized costume as a solo super-hero before joining the team, when he appeared briefly as the Avenging Angel). The Beast donned a

A gallery of X-Men foes

created during the Lee and Kirby period

Top: Magneto, master of Magnetism, and the self-billed most powerful evil mutant.

Top Right: the rest of Magneto's original Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, the Toad, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch, and Mastermind.

Middle Right: The Sentinels, robotic mutant-hunters.

Bottom: Professor X's insane step-brother, Cain Marko, alias the Juggernaut.

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red and blue version of his original X-threads, which he wore until his transformation into a furry, not-quite-human version of the same character (*AMAZING ADVENTURES #11*), at which point he needed only about as much costume as the Thing. Iceman had changed what little costume he possessed a bit over his career, but, like the Torch, it is hard to discern exactly what he is wearing when he uses his power (as Iceman, he resembles an anthropomorphic ice cube); his later Champions outfit provided him with his first actual uniform beyond shorts, boots, and a belt. Marvel Girl's changeover was the largest departure from the X-Men costumes of the first issue—perhaps understandably so, since she was the designer (with some help from Professor X, methinks) of the various uniforms, and no doubt took the opportunity to stop looking so much like one of the boys. Her skin-tight leotard was dumped in favor of a green mini-skirted dress with yellow accoutrements. It was nothing too scandalous next to some of the super-heroine costumes that have been created since (to say nothing of some of the ensembles the new Jean Grey herself has worn since as Phoenix, Dark Phoenix, and the Black Queen in more recent X-adventures), but it was nevertheless a daring costume for 1968, featuring as it did both a daring V-neck and bare legs at the same time (remember, this was 13 years ago!).

Regarding changes in their roster, the X-Men have had fewer (during their initial run) than any group this side of the Fantastic Four, although today they constitute one of the more populous super-teams, counting all past and present members. The first addition to the ranks beyond the charter members of issue #1 came when the Mimic, a former foe with the power to adopt the abilities of others and the only-ever non-mutant X-Man, became the group's temporary deputy leader. Later, as mentioned above, the Professor appeared to have perished, and the team carried on for a time without him. During that period, two new mutants allied themselves to the regulars: Lorna Dane, now called Polaris; and Alex Summers, Scott's younger brother, a.k.a. Havok. The Professor "returned from the dead," as it were, in issue #65, and then there were eight—just in time for the team's comic to be cancelled with #66.

X-MEN has been described, in George Olshevsky's Marvel Indexes and elsewhere, as the "bad boy" of the early Marvel line. After an opening string of eleven fantastic issues by originators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the book

passed into the artistic hands of the late Werner Roth, working initially under Kirby panel breakdowns (after a single issue by Alex Toth, also over Kirby layouts), and under the scripting direction of then-neophyte Roy Thomas (with #20). Many interesting and even innovative stories resulted, but the X-Men were never to be the super-stars that the F F and the Avengers (no matter who was on the team at any given moment) were, given this particular creative staff. After Thomas' departure, confusion reigned as Gary Friedrich and Arnold Drake (ironically, the co-creator of the X-lookalike Doom Patrol), singly and together, attempted to keep things going for the mutant heroes. Roth was assigned to the *"Origins of the X-Men"* back-up strip, and Don Heck took over the book's main feature. A few issues drawn in a pinch by *S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s Jim Steranko broke the mold, followed by the first published work of Barry *(CONAN)* Windsor-Smith, produced under truly awful working conditions and looking it (as Smith himself admits). Sales were still passable, but comparitively low for a Marvel super-hero comic of that period, and, with Thomas and Roth's original departure, the X-Men's adventures seemed to be viewed as a training ground for new (or new-to-Marvel) craftsmen perfecting their art before being shifted over to another, more prestigious series. Stan Lee was quoted as saying that he and Jack Kirby would never go back to *THE X-MEN*, and that the series "would have to make it on its own." Under recognizable Marvel regulars, such as Don Heck, or Roth, sales were steady but never outstanding, but, with issue #56, newcomer (to Marvel) Neal Adams joined a returning Roy Thomas to "revitalize" the title. Although Adams' work was excellent by any standards, and Thomas contributed some inventive plotting and dramatic dialogue, the sharp deviation from the series' established look and feel alienated many of the old-time readers, apparently without attracting a replacement audience quickly enough. Adams' work was dynamic and powerful, but was totally lacking in the warmth and charm that had been Roth's strength (another similarity—both *X-MEN* and *DOOM PATROL* were produced by craftsmen who had long associations with the romance comics genre, Werner Roth and Bruno Premiani), and the transition was extremely jarring. With *X-MEN*'s last shot at becoming a super-star attraction apparently a failure, Marvel cancelled the title, feeling that the creators involved could better devote their energies to other projects.

The group's new costumes. Professor X thought that the X-Men were no longer children, but individuals, and they should look individualized.

As always at Marvel, though, while a comic may die, the characters go on forever. The X-Men went undercover for a time, while their title was revived only as a reprint book. They resurfaced in *AMAZING ADVENTURES* to give a send-off to their first graduating member, the Beast, who was awarded his own short-lived strip. Following his change in appearance and loss of his solo vehicle, Hank McCoy joined the Avengers, where he has until recently remained, and thus his services were lost to his former mutant team-mates except in cases of dire emergency. The remaining X-Men (*sans* Havok and Polaris, who took a sabbatical to complete their academic graduate work, and incidentally guest-starred in an Archie Goodwin *HULK* story) turned up in mufti to help Spider-Man battle Morbius in an early *MARVEL TEAM-UP*, and Xavier helped Reed Richards and Tony Stark in an attempt to cure the Hulk.

The X-Men were still around, but they were losing members hand-over-fist.

The *X-MEN* comic always featured strong emphasis on the heroes' personal lives.

The Sentinels returned, and couldn't even find their old foes, and so contented themselves with fighting the Avengers instead. (At that time, the Avengers counted two mutants—Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch—as members.) Magneto returned and defeated the entire team, plus a handful of Avengers, with his new powers of mental domination. Rallying from that escapade, the X-Men discovered Angel among the missing, and instigated a search. Not only didn't they find him, but they discovered that Beast, Havok, and Polaris had also vanished—and while they were investigating further, Iceman disappeared as well. The remaining trio of Professor Xavier, Cyclops, and Marvel Girl (the latter two back in their original costumes for some unstated reason) cameod in yet another *HULK* tale before joining forces with Captain America and the Falcon in their title to battle the group called the Secret Empire and rescue their captive fellows. The X-Men were back at full fighting strength—minus the Beast—when suddenly...

In 1975, over five years since the all-but-loss of their own title, the X-Men were being revived...and yet again, they weren't being revived. As per Marvel's original plan at the time, new double-sized comics were being created for several super-team concepts, among them the Invaders, Champions, Inhumans, Guardians of the Galaxy, and...a new team of X-Men. (All of this will be dealt with in greater detail in a future column.) As it turned out, the "Giant-Size" idea was overthrown, and only two issues of *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN* appeared, the second being a reprint. And in the first, the original X-Men were defeated and captured, and Cyclops and the Professor were forced to recruit a new team (of diverse international origins) to bail them out. Thus, three supporting players from earlier tales (Sunfire from *X-MEN #64*, Banshee from *X-MEN #28*, etc., and Wolverine from *HULK #181*) joined forces with four new characters from the minds of Len Wein and Dave Cockrum (Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler, and Thunderbird), and the New X-Men were born.

In the next story, appearing in the revived *X-MEN* title (#94), the last of the original X-Men, save Cyclops, departed the familiar mansion for the last time as full-time students, having "graduated" at last. Angel and Iceman would try, with ultimate lack of success, to form their own super-team, the Champions; Marvel Girl would return a year later and would eventually metamorphosize into the Phoenix character; and all of them would be "on call" if needed. But the original team had really "come back" only to wish the new team "bon voyage"; their own history as a group was over.

The X-Men are dead; Long live the X-Men! •

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III. MEMBERSHIP

And now, our usual look at the roster of our featured team, including the entire membership up to the present day:

THE X-MEN
Founded: *X-MEN #38-57* (flashback episodes)/*X-MEN #1*

1. PROFESSOR X (Professor Charles Xavier)
Founder: *X-MEN #38/X-MEN #1*
see also DEFENDERS

2. CYCLOPS (Scott "Slim" Summers)
Joins: *X-MEN #42/X-MEN #1*

3. ICEMAN (Robert L. "Bobby" Drake)
Joins: *X-MEN #46/X-MEN #1*
see also CHAMPIONS

4. THE ANGEL (Warren K. Worthington III
Joins: *X-MEN #56/X-MEN #1*
see also CHAMPIONS

5. THE BEAST (Henry P. C. "Hank" Mc Coy)
Joins: *X-MEN #53/X-MEN #1*
see also AVENGERS, DEFENDERS

6. MARVEL GIRL/PHOENIX (Jean Grey)
Joins: *X-MEN #1*
Dies/Reincarnated: *X-MEN #101*
Dies: *X-MEN #137*

7. THE MIMIC (Calvin Rankin)
Joins: *X-MEN #27*
Resigns: *X-MEN #29*
Dies: *HULK #161*

8. POLARIS (Lorna Dane)
Joins (unofficially): *X-MEN #60*
see also DEFENDERS

9. HAVOK (Alex Summers)
Joins (unoffically): *X-MEN #65*
see also DEFENDERS

10. NIGHTCRAWLER (Kurt Wagner)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*

11. WOLVERINE (Logan)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*

12. THE BANSHEE (Sean Cassidy)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*

13. STORM (Ororo Monroe)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*

14. SUNFIRE (Shiro Yoshida)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*
Resigns: *X-MEN #94*

15. Colossus (Peter Rasputin (*Piotr Nikolievitch Rasputin*))
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*

16. THUNDERBIRD (John Proudstar)
Joins: *GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1*
Dies: *X-MEN #95*

17. Sprite (Katherine "Kitty" Pryde)
Joins: *X-MEN #138*

Possible recruits who have declined the offer to join include: the Blob (*X-MEN #3, 7*); Sub-Mariner (*X-MEN #6*); Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch (*X-MEN #11, 27*); Spider-Man (*X-MEN #27*); Jamie Madrox, the Multiple Man (*GIANT-SIZE FANTASTIC FOUR #4*); and Dazzler (*X-MEN #131*).

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Next Issue: *"Super-Team Spirit" investigates the lesser-known DC super-teams of the 1960s*

All illustrations ©1981 Milton Caniff

DOGTAGS & LACE

An overview of Milton Caniff's *"MALE CALL"*

by Robert Rhodes

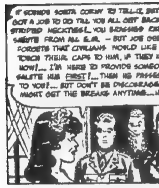
The book *MILTON CANIFF: REMBRANDT OF THE COMIC STRIP* has just been re-released by Flying Buttress Publications. Overall, the company did a fine job, and Rick Marschall's new material is appropriate, but one thing stands out: Caniff's *MALE CALL* is mentioned only twice. While the strip constitutes only a small proportion of Caniff's total output, something so unique (and so enjoyable) in the history of the comic strip should not be nudged aside so casually.

The strip is given different starting years by my two references: 1942 and 1943. No mention is made of any specific starting date. What both references agree upon, though, is that Caniff started the strip upon request from the Camp Newspaper Service, the armed forced newspaper syndicate responsible for providing all military newspaper news stories, fillers, and comics strips. Caniff, an enthusiastic supporter of World War II and an ever-ready morale booster, agreed to devise a daily strip oriented towards the entertainment interests of the enlisted man.

The earliest installments of the strip use characters drawn from Caniff's popular *TERRY AND THE PIRATES*. Burma, the svelte, blonde bombshell from that series, became the star of *MALE CALL*. When Caniff's syndicate (Chicago Tribune-New York News) objected to the use of their characters in the special weekly strip, Caniff promptly wrote Burma out and invented a new *femme fatale* to work with.

Caniff, who never actually served in any of the armed forces due to a medical disability, still had an intuitive feel for what the lonely and lowly enlisted man most longed for: cheesecake and home. *MALE CALL* not only catered to both of these longings, it often managed to blend them in such a way as to provide that day's installment with its required punch-line. Take for example, an installment that featured a GI and Miss Lace returning to her house after a night out. The G.I. complains, "Miss Lace, the trouble is, you lead a feller on—then just when he thinks you're willing, you back out!" Miss Lace, ever willing to make her share of sacrifices to the war effort, replies, "I suppose you're right, General...Let's use the sofa...I'll slip into something more comfortable and be right with you." The soldier's face could light up Broadway, as he squeals, "Oh boy oh boy!" And he does in fact spend a dream evening with Miss Lace, as she, in her extremely flimsy negligee, looks at the GI's family pictures.

In yet another instance of Caniff's subtle juxtapositioning of the soldier's love for alluring cheesecake and his equally strong devotion to the home-fires, a young freshly-scrubbed inductee shyly approaches Miss Lace and whispers what appears to be a truely shocking request into her ear. *"WHAT!"* responds the perturbed young lady. "I'm sorry, Miss Lace—I just sorta hoped..." mumbles the abashed young man, still obviously hopeful that the patriotric Miss Lace will accede to his plea. His hopes are fulfilled in the very next panel as Miss Lace



hesitantly responds, "Well—this is war...come to my place *late* tonight... I gotta watch my reputation!" As the much enthralled reader turns his attention to the installment's last panel, expecting to see the worst (or the best, depending on how your fantasies operate), Caniff lets loose with his visual punchline as the action shifts to Miss Lace's place late that night to reveal... the G.I. about to ravish a freshly-baked pie, an obvious example of Miss Lace's baking talents.

Caniff did not always use such innuendo and sexual teasing to produce a humorous punch-line. Occasionally he would cater to his readers' demands with installments that were little more than cheesecake-of-the-sake-of-cheesecake. One such strip, misleadingly entitled "Contour Map (Note Magnetic Azimuths and Topographical Features)" simply was a series of pin-ups of rather scantily clad, but extremely well-built, women positioned in various alluring poses. At the bottom of the last panel, Caniff gently chides his readers with one final note: "You mean you want a gag, *too*?"

But *MALE CALL* should not be dismissed simply as callow entertainment for young soldiers. Caniff's skill as a comic strip writer allowed him to use Miss Lace and all of her many attractive qualities to make several penetrating observations about the debilitating effects of combat conditions, a soldier's constant and continual longing for home, military prejudice, and civilian indifference.

Take for example a strip that ran roughly midway through the series' run which features Miss Lace out night-clubbing with what seems to be a civilian. Two soldiers, obviously piqued by Miss Lace's favoritism of someone who, in their eyes, is doubtless shirking his military responsibilities, decide to hassle the fellow as he leads Miss Lace off the dance floor. They walk up to his side, deliberately jostle him, and insultingly inquire, "Hiya, bub! How's things in essential indus—" Their hazing is interrupted by the man's panic, as disoriented, he calls "Lace! *Lace!* Where are you?" Miss Lace, highly indignant, stares at the two soldiers, and introduces them to her obviously blind companion. "Yes, General, it's a GI also back from the South Pacific... he wants to shake your hand!" Caniff's underplaying of this scene allows the reader to draw his own conclusions about the validity of judging those not serving in uniform. In yet another installment, Lace gently reprimands a GI who is scornfully dismissing those officers and enlisted men who are serving stateside rather than seeking combat assignments. Pointing towards a monument to those who died in the Civil War, Lace reminds who companion that those soldiers didn't serve overseas yet *they* managed to serve their country in their own way.

No matter how severe Caniff was in condemning the military predilection for scorning all civilians, he was equally intolerent of those self-satisfied civilians who refused to understand the sacrifices being made by the military. In one rather spectacular installment, Lace accompanies a young GI who has just returned from the front having lost an arm in action. While walking, the couple is observed by a corpulent man and women, both well-dressed and, from the way their noses are tilted upwards, very proud. Lace overhears these passers-by make disparaging remarks about her companion, and decides to give these complacent civilians a taste of combat conditions. The police are called in in the nick of time to rescue her hapless victims, as Lace, having defended her companion's honor, withdraws from the field of battle.

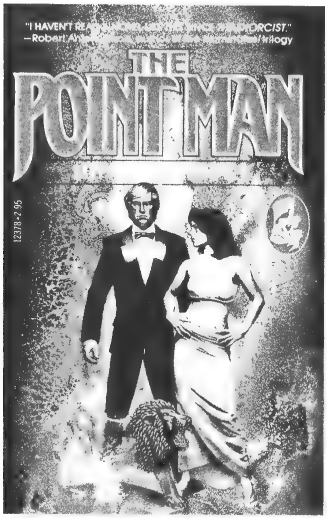
Toward the end of the strip's run, Caniff started featuring the soldier who was re-entering civilian life and de-emphasized the role of Miss Lace. This was hardly unforgivable—many of the strip's readers were finally experiencing flesh-and-blood women again, most of whom would not have been pleased with pen-and-ink competition. But the strip quickly lost what little focus it had when Miss Lace was absent. It jumped erratically from subject to subject, from lead character to lead character, with Miss Lace—the strip's sole unifying element—relegated to what was little more than a cameo appearance once a month or so. Caniff did include her in the last episode, entitled "Small World." In it, Miss Lace encounters a baby-faced draftee. "Miss Lace?" inquires the lad. "Yes, General, what can I do for you—and don't pull any surprises!" responds the ever-alert young military booster. The young man mumbles a little and then blurts out, "And my Pop told me to look you up if I was ever this way..." "Your *Pop*?" Miss Lace asks, stunned. "Yes'm, he met you on his way to Okinawa the last war!" is the lad's response, as Miss Lace buries her face in her hands.

According to *THE WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COMICS*—granted, not particularly the most

Solid Sender

trustworthy source—that last strip appeared on March 3, 1946. The strip had served its purpose. While the strip's lack of continuity and specific location prevented Caniff from using his techniques for dramatic effect as fully as in his regular syndicated strips, he did occasionally make use of an unusual viewpoint angle or silhouette effect. Caniff *did* get to draw people, and plenty of them, in all situations and with a full range of expressions. His work in portraying people in *MALE CALL* is simply superb. *MALE CALL* may not have been the strip that made Caniff's reputation, but it does not deserve to be either forgotten or ignored. ●

(Those who are interested in investigating the strip more fully themselves may note that it appeared in the Menomonee Falls *GAZETTE* in all issues from #105-127, and in all odd-numbered issues from #129-141.)



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THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES

by Chuck Wooley

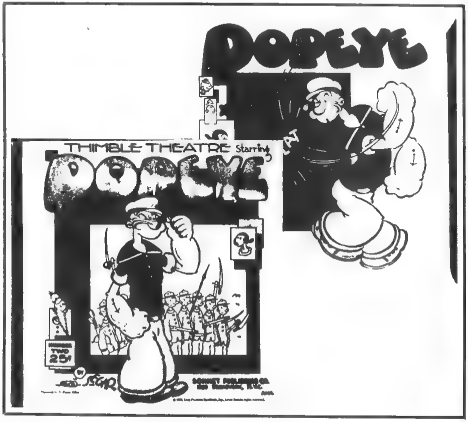
SONNET PUBLISHING CO.

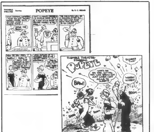
E.C. Segar had been a cartoonist for at least ten years before he created Popeye. During the World War I era Segar had worked on the *CHARLIE CHAPLIN* daily strip, and by the close of the Roaring Twenties he had successfully developed the now-famous strip known as *THIMBLE THEATRE*. The character that would make Segar internationally famous, however, was originally a walk-on character—a "throwaway." Luckily, Popeye quickly developed into a "returnable," and has gone on to appear in thousands of newspaper strips and hundreds of comic books. Popeye is one of only a handful of strips to survive for over fifty years, and one of the very few to introduce new words and phrases into the English language.

1929 was a fertile year for comic strips, if not for the economy. Popeye, Tarzan, and Buck Rogers all debuted as newspaper strip features during the tumult that marked the close of the 1920s. Tough times were about to assail the populace, and resilient heroes became a staple of the funny pages and pulp magazines. Mickey Mouse first appeared in 1928 (as tough and valiant a character as ever "lived"—in his early days), and by the early 1930s other heroes, like Doc Savage and the Shadow, were gaining widespread popularity. Even Blondie, who began life as a simple flapper, had by the early 1930s settled down into a family routine. Times were very hard indeed for many people, and oftentimes the problems of the average person seemed nearly overwhelming. It was refreshing, therefore, to read the exploits of someone who could triumph over any challenge—especially when that character did so with laughter in his soul.

To understand Popeye one must understand his environment, even though with each passing year it becomes increasingly difficult to interpret the events of earlier decades, as eyewitnesses die and cultures undergo radical changes. Sonnet Publishing Co. (located on Broadway in NYC in 1932), however, managed to vividly capture the aspirations of an era in the only two comic books that it ever published: *THIMBLE THEATRE STARRING POPEYE* #s 1 and 2.

As Book #2 opens (the author, unfortunately, did not have access to book #1 for this article), Popeye and Olive Oyl's relative, Castor, are waiting for a new assignment for their detective agency. Popeye is delineated in his early style with the long, sausage-like nose and equally exaggerated chin, and all of the Oyls apparently appear (albeit briefly) in this one comic (something that could not happen a few years later, as Olive's family—the former stars of *THIMBLE THEATRE*—were exchanged for Pop-





eye's own supporting cast). Book #2 therefore marks an important transition point for the strip, as Segar realizes that Popeye has come to dominate the strip and that it is time for most of the Oyls to retire from newspaper life.

The thrust of the story (which was to be concluded in the never-issued Book #3) is that agents of the island country known as "Nazilia" are recruiting help for their war, and they want Popeye and Castor to aid them. Olive manages to get a job as the army cook (at half of Popeye's salary), and all three set off for the war-torn island.

In typical Segar style, however, the war is largely in the minds of the King and his main general, Bunzo. After all, the war has been on for six months, and no one has been shot! Most of the story, then, concerns the political machinations that Popeye must undergo in order to survive on this crazy island. The King becomes Popeye's friend and confidant, while the general is his basic antagonist.

What makes this story such a revealing record of everyday life in the 1930s is its simple symbolism. Popeye is clearly an everyman figure, who somehow survives numerous bureaucracy-inspired attempts on his life, well-being, and happiness (not to mention the fact that he is being paid in worthless foreign currency). Certainly in a country ravaged with 25% unemployment, there were many homeless and hungry individuals who took inspiration from Popeye's undaunted spirit and unflappable optimism concerning survival. When about to be beheaded, Popeye adroitly snaps his head back from the cutting block and then overwhelms his executioners. When placed before the firing squad, Popeye takes five bullets into his chest, and then goes about his business. There must have been many people in the early 1930s who were out of work, without money, and with families to support. Facing the landlord at such times was often like facing an executioner. But people did it and survived, just like Popeye survived. Popeye's immense popularity during this period shows that many people were taking some comfort from his antics.

What makes the two comics issued by Sonnet so important, then, is that they forever capture the essence of Segar's Popeye. He was a character born in hard times, who learned very young that he had to fight in this world to survive. Popeye managed to maintain a pure and loving heart through the midst of the worst adversity, however, and his unending affection for the helpless and for the underdog has made him a friend and inspiration to generations of Americans.

Sonnet was apparently the only company to publish actual strip reprints from Popeye's extraordinary early days. Their two comics (issued in the square black-and-white style that was the dominant comic book format during the 1920s) thus stand as an important record of one of the most significant strips ever drawn. Their books are extremely rare today, and that is probably due to erratic distribution originally. The introduction to Book #2, which was jointly written by Segar and Popeye, is an unabashed plug attempting to get people to buy multiple copies of Popeye's current book, as that would enable Sonnet to publish Book #3. Certainly readers had good incentive for promoting Book #2, as the story in it is superbly entertaining, and was to be continued into Book #3! Unfortunately, Book 2 failed to achieve sufficient success for Book #3 to be published.

Luckily, Popeye was such a boisterous character that he could not long be ignored, and by the middle-late 1930s his exploits were again being recounted. There were coloring books, illustrated text books, and appearances in *KING COMICS*. Furthermore, Popeye was once again given his own comic book in the *BLACK AND WHITE* and *FEATURE BOOK* series in the late 1930s, and shortly after the conclusion of World War II he was given a series of one-shot comics (in the Dell *"Four Color"* series) that were entirely original and done by Popeye's other master writer/artist; Bud Sagendorf.

Segar, who modeled his Popeye character on a feisty little man who lived close to Segar in a little community in Illinois, died in the 1930s. Within a few years Sagendorf (who reportedly was an assistant for Segar) had taken over the strip, and Sagendorf clearly deserves much of the credit for Popeye's *enduring* popularity (along with Fleischer Studios, whose magnificent Popeye cartoons are still being shown).

Segar wrote and drew Popeye for about seven years, creating phrases like "I yam what I am!" and "Blow me down!", as well as the words "Jeep" and "Goon." Likewise, Segar created Popeye's basic supporting cast. It is Sagendorf, however, who popularized the character during the last forty years.

So, even though a cruel fate squelched the printing of Sonnet's *THIMBLE THEATRE STARRING POPEYE* Book #3, just as it took Segar from us a few years later, it is nonetheless a lucky posterity that yet can treasure Sonnet's Books #1 and 2. ●

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End NOTES

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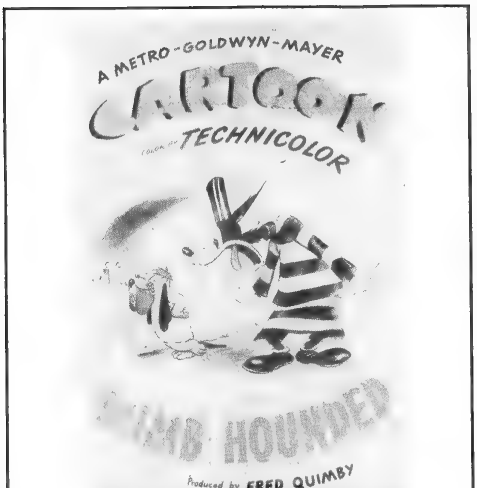
"The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently, it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective. This correction is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and events."

This is how the French philosopher Henri Bergson defined comedy in his celebrated 1900 essay *"Laughter,"* and it has particular relevance to those twentieth century comedies that take the form of animated cartoons. In last issue's column we examined cyclical patterns of repeated, "mechanical" movement in *"The Sorcerer's Apprentice"* sequence of Disney's *FANTASIA*. This sort of cyclical action often plays a role in other animated comedies as well.

Like melodramas, the classic animated comedies pit a hero against a villain. In the melodramas, the hero triumphs at the end; in many animated comedies, however, the hero scores a long series of victories over his persistent adversary, climaxing with a triumph which finally utterly defeats the villain, resolving the conflict and allowing the cartoon to come to a satisfying conclusion. This is the familiar structure of many memorable series, such as Bugs Bunny, Tweety and Sylvester, Tom and Jerry, Droopy, and Chuck Jones' Sheepdog and Wolf. In many cases the structure is made particularly clear by the "blackout" gag format of the cartoon: instead of there being continuous action in the cartoon, the action stops at the completion of each gag (and hence after each defeat suffered by the villain) and picks up again, after a momentary pause, with the beginning of the villain's next effort. The sheer repetitiveness adds to the comedic effect of the cartoon, as with each failure by the villain the hero looks more invincible, the villain's attempts more futile, and the villain himself more foolish.

The more that the cyclical element is emphasized, the stronger the cartoon often may be. Take the following three Friz Freleng cartoons featuring Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam. In *PIKER'S PEAK* Sam sets out to climb the Scmatterhorn to the cheering of the assembled crowd and the jaunty but faintly silly music of a Swiss town band. In the course of competing with Bugs to reach the top first, Sam continually ends up sliding all the way back down the mountain and into the village square. Each time he picks himself up and stalks back towards the mountain the band starts playing that same music again, which sounds increasingly ludicrous with each repetition. *MUTINY ON THE BUNNY* takes the absurdity further. This time Sam, dressed as Captain Bligh, has shanghaied Bugs and is trying to force the rebellious rabbit to perform slave labor on his ship. Eventually each clash between Sam and Bugs ends with the sinking of the ship, leading to the cartoon's recurring image of Sam hard at work repairing the hole in the ship's bottom, and the ship being relaunched amid cheering and confetti, only, of course, to be sunk again in the very next encounter between Sam and Bugs, who, strangely enough, is still aboard the ship. The most extreme and funniest of the three is *HIGH DIVING HARE*. Here Bugs is running a show featuring a high diving act but the high diver is not able to make it to the show in time. Sam demands to see someone perform the act, and forces Bugs up the seemingly mile-high ladder and onto the diving board at gunpoint. Bugs naturally maneuvers Sam into unwittingly taking the dive himself. Sam rapidly climbs back up the ladder, infuriated at being tricked, only to be tricked into jumping once again. After this process continues for a while, Freleng simply shows us a point halfway up the ladder, and for several seconds we watch Sam race up the ladder, then hurtle past us on his way down, race up, hurtle down, and so forth. We never find out how Bugs manages to trick him in these instances, and it does not matter: the fact that the cycle is continuing is all that is important. Finally we see Sam ascend the ladder, a moment passes, and nothing happens. What is going on? Did Sam manage to beat the cycle? The scene shifts back up to the diving board; Bugs, at the end of the board, is tied up from head to foot, while Sam, nastily confident, is sawing away at the other end. The result is not what Sam expects: once Sam has sawed through the board, he and everything else falls while Bugs and the board remain safely suspended in mid-air. Neither the cycle nor Bugs can be defeated: the laws of the universe themselves will bend in their behalf.

Animated comedies can be built around a character's repeated attempts to defeat an unbeatable opponent, as in those just described, or about a character's continuous efforts to simply escape a foe. In Tex Avery's *NORTHWEST HOUNDED POLICE* an escaped convict wolf tries desperately to escape the seemingly slow-moving Droopy, who here is a Mountie, and as such, "always gets his man." No matter where the wolf runs in his increasingly hysterical (in both senses of the word) and surreal flight all over the world, he comes face to face with his nemesis. Droopy emerges from under a tiny rock on a four-foot long island in the middle of the ocean, or he greets the wolf from a movie screen in a theater in which the wolf is hiding, or he even emerges in the form of the wolf's own transformed face after a rush plastic surgery job. Similarly, in Bob Clampett's *DRAFTEE DAFFY*, Daffy Duck makes a futile and ever more feverish attempt to get away



The popular Avery motif of the inescapable nemesis is repeated in *DUMB—HOUNDED.*

from a quiet, inoffensive-looking man from the draft board. Again and again Daffy tells us he thinks he has gotten rid of this inescapable little authority figure only to hear the latter say, "Well now, I wouldn't say that." In Daffy's final burst of hysteria, he locks the little man in a safe, jumps aboard a rocket and launches himself towards outer space. The rocket malfunctions and instead plunges deep into the Earth, and Daffy, to his horror, finds himself in Hell. But nevertheless, Daffy remarks to a devil standing in the shadows nearby, at least he is finally rid of that guy from the draft board. The "devil" steps into the light. Guess who it really is.

Breaking the cycle is a hard thing to do in cartoons if one is a villain like Sam or the convict wolf, or an unscrupulous born loser like Daffy. Not even death provided an escape for Daffy in *DRAFTEE DAFFY*. In Freleng's *SHOW BIZ BUGS* Bugs and Daffy are both vaudeville performers, but whereas Bugs' mere appearance generates an ovation from the audience, Daffy's most determined efforts meet with, at best, dead silence save for the sound of far away crickets, and, at worst, a tomato hurled right in his face. Daffy refuses to settle for the position fate has handed him, keeps trying his acts and failing, and even tries to kill Bugs, with an equal lack of success. Finally, Daffy wins a storm of applause from the audience by consuming a number of explosives in a devil costume, and then swallowing a lighted match, triggering off an explosion. Bugs congratulates Daffy on the ovation, and Daffy's ghost, rising upward, says, "I know, I know, but I can only do it once," and then looks as if he was lost, as well he might be. This time death provided an escape from the cycle, but it was an empty triumph. Daffy could only break the cycle of failure by accepting a defeat of another sort. The bandits in Tex Avery and Michael Lah's *DEPUTY DROOPY* find themselves in a similar situation. They have captured Droopy and are trying to rob a safe, but they fear that if they make the least noise, it will alert the nearby sheriff. Droopy therefore keeps coming up with ways of causing them to make noise, such as by heating their burglar tools red hot, or having a lobster clamp its claw onto one of them, forcing the bandits to race what seems like two miles away before they can allow themselves to cry out in pain (or burp or giggle or whatever). This pattern keeps repeating itself in increasingly silly ways (with the bandits even exchanging heads at one point for reasons I have no room to explain here) until finally, having carried a gigantic stick of dynamite miles from the safe and endured the explosion, one weary bandit declares, "It's not worth it," and the two of them march into jail of their own free will.

Yet another treatment of death in relation to a comic cycle of events is found in Freleng's *BACK ALLEY OPROAR*. Sylvester the cat persists in singing his jolly songs outside Elmer Fudd's window while Elmer is trying to sleep. Fudd's repeated attempts to silence the cat never work for long, so finally he piles explosives behind Sylvester and lights the fuse. They immediately explode, and Elmer finds himself wearing a halo and lying on an ascending cloud. Fudd is content: he is free of Sylvester's singing and can finally get some peace and quiet. But then, to his horror, Elmer finds himself surrounded by ascending ghosts of Sylvester, one for each of the cat's traditional nine lives, all singing the sext from the opera *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR*, and, in panic, Fudd hurls himself off the cloud and lands below, off-camera, with a big thud. Death did not free Elmer of the cycle, and, as with Ben Kenobi in *STAR WARS*, death only made Sylvester more "powerful" than before.

Notice, that what is a series of defeats for Fudd is a series of successes for Sylvester: comic cycles can be positive as well as negative. In *BACK ALLEY OPROAR* Sylvester represents a spirit of fun, of self-assertion, and self-expression, and of defiance of restrictive rules, and that spirit cannot be repressed no matter what Elmer, in his role as authority figure, does. This kind of conflict is portrayed more distinctly in Robert McKimson's *DAFFY DOODLES*. Here Daffy Duck is the id incarnate. Daffy is the mysterious mustache painter who has been wreaking havoc on the city, painting his mustaches everywhere: on posters, on bill-boards, on people in the subway, and, especially, on his nemesis, Police Officer Porky Pig, an

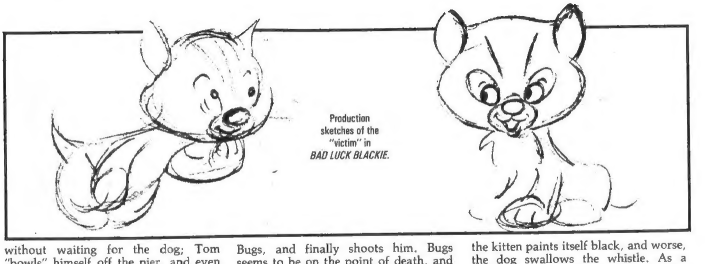
Animator Supreme Preston Blair's famous "strut" sequence from *RED HOT RIDING HOOD* provided a steamy counterpoint to the lustful wolf's hysteria and comic frenzy.

unlikely candidate for the role of embodying a repressive superego. Daffy leads Porky on a merry chase, painting mustache after mustache as they go, but eventually Porky represses the duck's mustache madness *but good* by knocking him over the head with his nightstick. After being declared not guilty by a jury consisting of a dozen doubles of the mustachioed comedian Jerry Colonna, Daffy somberly promises the judge that he will never paint a mustache again. "I'm doing beards now!" he cries joyfully, and explodes into action, painting a beard on the judge and finally blackening the "camera lens" itself with paint. The id has broken free of its repression and the cycle happily continues.

Similarly, there is the case of the night club patron wolf of Avery's *RED HOT RIDING HOOD* who erupts into a comic frenzy, whistling and beating himself over the head, whenever he sees the sexy Riding Hood of the title do her song and dance act. But after a catastrophic encounter with Red's manhungry grandmother, the wolf declares he will kill himself if he ever looks at another woman again. At that moment Red appears and begins her act again, and the wolf shoots himself, but his ghost rises from his body and launches into the usual sexual hysteria. As with Sylvester in *OPROAR*, the id has survived the ultimate repression, death, and the cycle joyously goes on once again. Avery's later *LITTLE RURAL RIDING HOOD* handles the same theme less spectacularly. A country wolf's lustful frenzy on witnessing Red's act is repressed by a blow from a hammer administered by his refined, self-controlled city cousin, who then drives the wolf home, lecturing him on the errors of his ways. But once in the country, the city wolf launches into similar sexual hysteria on spotting one of the local women, and has to be calmed down (into unconsciousness) by a hammer blow from his country cousin. Obviously realizing that the city wolf's prohibition against sexual passion has just proved to be hollow, the country wolf gleefully drives back to the city, there presumably to resume his girl-watching activities.

A cartoon hero's man triumphs over his opponent within a particular cartoon also form a positive cycle, of course. Sometimes a cartoon even indicates that itself as a whole is but one link in a long chain of victories for its leading character. After having "wrecked the putty tat" at the end of Freleng's *BAD OL' PUTTTY TAT*, Tweety observes, "You know, I lose more putty tats that way." More strikingly, in Jones' *RABBIT OF SEVILLE*, after thoroughly defeating defeating Elmer Fudd while playing the role of Rossini's operatic barber, Bugs cunningly looks off to the side and says, "Next!"

In combatting an opponent, the cartoon hero may impose a particular kind of "mechanical" movement upon him. In Freleng's *SLICK HARE* Bugs sets up a cycle of action in which, disguised as a waiter, he comes through a door, orders a pie from chef Fudd, Fudd makes it and calls out "Pick up pie," Bugs re-enters and picks it up, leaves, immediately returns, declaring "Your pie, sir," and hits Fudd with it, and then before Fudd can react, leaves and re-enters yet again ordering a new pie. For a while it seems as if this cycle could go on perpetually. In McKimson's *IT'S HUMMER TIME* a cat, vainly attempting to catch a tricky hummingbird, keeps disturbing a blandly sadistic bulldog instead. Each time the bulldog drags the cat off to some ludicrous means of punishment that the cat has obviously experienced before, perhaps many times. "No! Not that!" cries the cat, "Not the Thinker! Not the Thinker!" just before the bulldog tosses him into a cement mixer from which the cat emerges as a feline version of Rodan's statue. The cat's attempts on the bird's life keep plunging the cat into a re-enactment of a past real-life nightmare. Perhaps the greatest success a cartoon hero can have is the one in Jones' Tom and Jerry cartoon *MUCH ADO ABOUT MOUSING*. Each time Jerry blows a whistle, a bulldog grabs Tom, forces him into the shape of a bowling ball, and "bowls" him off a pier into the water, where a lobster grabs his tail with his sharp claw. By the end of the cartoon Tom fears the bulldog's approach so much that he enacts the cycle himself



Production sketches of the "victim" in *BAD LUCK BLACKIE.*

without waiting for the dog; Tom "bowls" himself off the pier, and even fastens the lobster to his tail himself. In Jones' celebrated "hunting trilogy" (*RABBIT FIRE, RABBIT SEASONING,* and *DUCK RABBIT DUCK*) Bugs continuously tricks Daffy into asking Elmer to shoot the duck, and finally, toward the end of *DUCK RABBIT DUCK*, the beleagured duck, with full awareness of what he is saying, is begging Elmer to shoot him without Bugs' having to speak a word.

Two of the most memorable Clampett cartoons play on the cycle idea intriguingly. *THE BIG SNOOZE* begins with an explicitly cyclical motion gag that, I believe, was first introduced in Avery's Bugs cartoon *ALL THIS AND RABBIT STEW*: Elmer chases Bugs into a hollow log overhanging a cliff, and Bugs keeps turning the log around from the outside so that Elmer continually finds himself emerging from the log into empty air. Finally Elmer angrily breaks the cycle by storming out and tearing up his Warners contract. Bugs pleads with Fudd to continue, and after Fudd refuses, forces him to reconsider by mentally entering a dream of Fudd's and turning it into a surreal nightmare in which Fudd, astonishingly enough, is stripped, turned into a transvestite, and menaced by death. Awakening in terror, Fudd pieces together his contract, reenters the log, and Bugs begins turning it around again. The cycle continues, and Elmer paid in a nightmarish way far weirder than Mickey's in *"The Sorcerer's Apprentice"* for trying to escape the role fate has decreed for him in that cycle.

Elmer tries to break the cycle again in Clampett's *THE OLD GREY HARE*, which begins with Elmer, in tears, wondering if the eternal chase will ever end: will he ever catch the wabbit? We see in a flashback that Bugs has been outwitting Elmer since they were both babies, and The Voice of God grants Fudd and us a vision of the future, in which an ancient Fudd still pursues an equally old Bugs, and finally shoots him. Bugs seems to be on the point of death, and even digs his own grave while Fudd wails in sorrow. But then, as the two foes shake hands in parting, Elmer finds himself in the grave while the hale and hearty Bugs begins filling it up: "So long, Methuselah!" Buried, but still alive, Elmer reflects that at least he is finally rid of the rabbit, but then, echoing the man from the draft board, the elderly Bugs burrows down, says, "Oh, now, I wouldn't say that," and presents Elmer with a lighted stick of dynamite. The cycle of Bugs-Fudd conflicts, it would seem, can never be stopped, even by death, and hence, there is something transcendent about it.

The title character of Avery's *THE CAT THAT HATED PEOPLE* is caught in a continuous cycle of abuse from humans. He decides to break the cycle by fleeing to the moon, but there finds himself caught in a worse cycle of abuse by the surreal lunar creatures. The cat therefore returns to Earth and we last see him the way we had at an earlier point: repeatedly being trod upon by a parade of human feet. But this time the cat is happy. It is no use trying to defy the cycle fate imposed on your life: attempts at escape will only embroil one in an even worse pattern of action.

Heroes and innocents, however, can free themselves from unpleasant cycles with the help of the "magic" cartoon characters often can possess. The kitten in Avery's *BAD LUCK BLACKIE* is ceaselessly tormented by an evil bulldog (yes, another one) until he meets a "magical" black cat. Each time the dog attacks from then on, the kitten blows a whistle, the black cat crosses the dog's path, and bad luck, in the form of various objects falling from the sky, literally strikes the dog. The dog's cycle of torture is thus replaced by the black cat's cycle of retribution. The dog tries various ways of stopping the cat, and finally succeeds by painting him white, thereby nullifying the "magic." But then the kitten paints itself black, and worse, the dog swallows the whistle. As a result, each time the dog hiccups, the whistle sounds, and an incredible array of objects hurtles toward the villain: a steam roller, a huge plane, and even an ocean liner. This final image brings home even more pointedly that it is the dog's actions that trigger the acts of retribution, and the cycle of retribution is triumphantly re-established.

The "hero's" cycle displaces his adversary's in Freleng's *THE PINK PHINK* as well. Here a painter is continually painting things blue while the Pink Panther is constantly painting everything pink. The cyclic nature of the activity is emphasized when at one point the two keep walking around a pillar, painting over each other's work. Finally the Panther's pink cycle wins out, and the painter and, indeed, the whole world of the film ends up pink, reflecting the Panther's now-dominant personality.

Above all, repeated actions can evoke a sense of futility. In Jones' *MUCH ADO ABOUT NUTTING* a poor squirrel tries over and over to crack open a coconut, eventually succeeding only to find another coconut inside. In Jones' celebrated *ONE FROGGY EVENING* a construction worker tries to make himself rich through exhibiting a singing, dancing frog he has found. Yet repeatedly, whenever he shows the frog to anyone else, it reverts to being an ordinary croaking amphibian. The man finally escapes the cycle by returning the frog to the inside of a cornerstone, but not before he has been reduced to utter destitution, and, far in the future, another construction worker finds the frog and the cycle of doom begins again for a new victim.

If there is one animated cartoon character who stands as the archetype of the victim entrapped in a cycle of failure, it is Wile E. Coyote in Jones' Roadrunner cartoons. Bergson notes that "At the root of the comic there is a sort of rigidity which compels its vic-

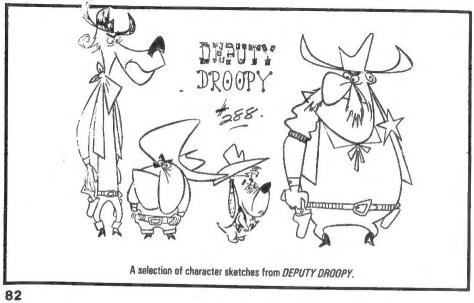
tims to keep strictly to one path, to follow it straight along, to shut their ears and refuse to listen. In Moliere's plays how many comic scenes can be reduced to this simple type: "a character following up his one idea, and constantly recurring to it in spite of incessant interruptions!" Here is the Coyote, persisting in his pursuit of the Roadrunner despite "incessant" failures, refusing to abide by the logic that would tell him to give up. The Coyote's eternal fate is also foretold by Bergson: "Not infrequently comedy sets before us a character who lays a trap in which he is the first to be caught... In every case the root idea involves... a situation which recoils on the head of its author... In the end it engenders comic any mishap that befalls one through one's own fault."

The Roadrunner, unshakingly confident and gifted with super-speed, is an embodiment of perfection, and literally travels in a straight unbroken line. The Coyote, a bundle of nerves who is easily startled by his opponent's "beep-beep," incarnates imperfection, and he figuratively follows a cyclical pattern of repeated attempts at success and inevitable defeats as his schemes "recoil on his head." His repeated falls into canyons mirror the repeated collapses of his often complex plans. The Coyote is an odd sort of anti-hero. He is in the wrong because he wants to eat the likable, intelligent Roadrunner, and yet one can justify his actions because we are continually shown that he is hungry, sometimes even starving, and it is natural for coyotes to eat other animals. His persistence despite unending failure is foolish, but also strangely admirable. He is at once sympathetic and unsympathetic, like Daffy Duck, who, interestingly enough, rose heavenward while garbed as a devil at the end of *SHOW BIZ BUGS*.

Sexual enthusiasm cut from the final print of *RED HOT RIDING HOOD*.

At the end of *GUIDED MUSCLE* the Coyote quits the cycle and drags out a card, "Wanted—One gullible coyote—Apply to the management of this theater," so that a substitute may take his place in the eternal madness. But there really is no escape for Wile E., as the end of *WILD ABOUT HURRY* demonstrates: trapped in a steel ball, the Coyote is catapulted down waterfalls and through other dangers only to begin travelling down the very same path once again at the close of the cartoon. (The Roadrunner holds up a sign: "Here we go again.") The whole cosmos conspires against the poor Coyote: at the end of *FASTEST WITH THE MOSTEST*, having fallen while the Roadrunner remains above, suspended in space, the Coyote holds up a sign reading, "I wouldn't mind but he defies the law of gravity." Natural laws, as with Bugs, warp themselves to aid the hero and defeat his foe. During the most recent Jones Roadrunner cartoon, made for 1980's *BUGS BUNNY IS BUSTIN' OUT ALL OVER*, the Coyote, after enduring an explosion, holds up a sign asking, "How did I get into this line of work anyway?" Like a Samuel Beckett character, it seems he no longer remembers how he became entrapped in this cycle of futility. When, at the end of the cartoon, the chase cycle finally seems to come to a (temporary) end when the Coyote finally catches his prey, his victory proves to be worthless: the conspiring cosmos has shrunk the Coyote down to a small fraction of the Roadrunner's size. Beckett's characters wait for a Godot who never comes; Wile E. Coyote waits for a roast Roadrunner dinner that will never materialize.

The Coyote is caught in an endless comic nightmare, but he has the strength of mind not to let it drive him to madness or despair. Other cartoon characters cannot endure repeated failure so well. The Coyote's other self, Ralph Wolf, goes mad on encountering his foe the Sheepdog everywhere he looks, and finally multiplied a score of times, in Jones' *READY, WOOLEN AND ABLE*. Similarly, in Arthur Davis' *BOWERY BUGS*, when the rabbit's opponent realizes that almost everyone he has met in the cartoon is a rabbit (actually Bugs in disguises), he jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge. The escaped convict of Avery and Lah's *CELL-BOUND* goes mad when he finds himself trapped inside the warden's television set (don't ask) for the second time. In each case the madness is presumably temporary and remains comic rather than becoming disturbingly serious, but it is nevertheless present, a result of the cyclical comic action, creating a nightmare come true.•



A selection of character sketches from *DEPUTY DROOPY*.

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